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HOLD FAST

BY

YOUR SUNDAYS



OUR FATHER'S HOUSE

GLAD TIDINGS

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "MARGARET'S CHOICE"



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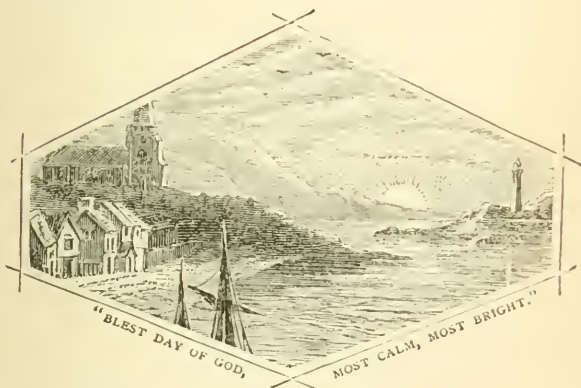
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HOLD FAST BY YOUR SUNDAYS.



"DO YOU KNOW, HARRY, I DATE ALL MY TROUBLES AND VEXATIONS FROM THAT WRETCHED SUNDAY. ALL IS NOT GOLD THAT GLITTERS; AND SOMEHOW EVERYTHING HAS GONE WRONG WITH ME SINCE."

HOLD FAST BY FOUR SUNDAYS.



BY THE AUTHOR OF "DEEPPDALE VICARAGE," "MARGARET'S CHOICE," ETC.

WITH INTRODUCTORY NOTE

BY THE

REV. CHARLES BULLOCK, B.D., FORMERLY RECTOR OF ST. NICHOLAS',
WORCESTER; EDITOR OF "HOME WORDS," ETC.

NEW EDITION.

London:

"HOME WORDS" OFFICE, 7, PATERNOSTER SQUARE, E.C.

BUTLER & TANNER,
THE SELWOOD PRINTING WORKS,
FROME, AND LONDON.

PR
4859
K766h
Dedicated
1889
TO

THE MEMORY OF

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE

THE EARL OF SHAFTESBURY, K.G.,

"THE WORKING MAN'S FRIEND,"

WHO SO NOBLY VINDICATED NOT ONLY

THE RIGHTS OF LABOUR

BUT

THE SABBATH RIGHT OF REST.



Hold Fast by your Sundays.

BY THE REV. RICHARD WILTON, M.A., RECTOR OF LONDESBOROUGH, EAST
YORKSHIRE, AUTHOR OF "SUNGLEAMS: SONNETS AND RONDEAUX," ETC.

HOLD fast by your Sundays ; let nothing have power
To take from God's children their birthright and dower,
The Rest-Day appointed in Eden's fair bower
Ere sin had yet clouded earth's glad morning hour.

Hold fast by your Sundays, the Sabbath of Rest,
God's solemn commandment from Sinai's crest,
When awed by the thunder, by darkness oppress,
Their sin and their weakness His people confest.

Hold fast by your Sundays ; the Saviour arose
In triumph on Sunday, and scattered your foes,
His labours all ended, and borne all His woes,
That you might have pardon and faith's sweet repose.

Hold fast by your Sundays ; the Spirit came down
On Sunday, and gave it a gladsome renown ;
On calm Christian Sabbaths no thunder-clouds frown ;
Grace, peace, and rejoicing are Sunday's bright crown.

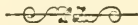
Hold fast by your Sundays ; earth's business and care
In six weary work-days have more than their share ;
Then comes the blest Sabbath : of labour beware
Which steals from the Rest-Day to which you are heir.

Hold fast by your Sundays ; of pleasure take heed
Which seeks from God's worship your footsteps to lead :
Oh, pause, Sabbath-breaker, that flower is a weed
Which stings as you pluck it, and bears deadly seed.

Hold fast by your Sundays, the earnest and sign
Of "Rest" that "remaineth" in mansions Divine ;
With streaks of Heaven's glory our Sabbaths now shine,
Some grapes they now yield us from Eshecol's rich vine.

Hold fast by your Sundays ; these happy Lord's-Days
On wings as of eagles your souls shall upraise,
While faith's joyful worship and hope's cheering lays
Ring in the grand Sabbath and thunders of praise !

From "HOME WORDS."

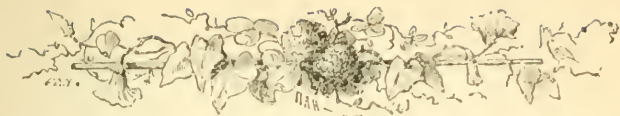




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INTRODUCTORY NOTE.



OLD FAST BY YOUR SUNDAYS originally appeared as a Serial Tale in "HOME WORDS."

Its gifted Author has since ceased from earthly labours, and entered into the Sabbath rest and joy of the Master's Home above. The entrusted talent had long been employed for good and noble ends: and "godly living" issued in "blissful dying." "HEAVEN NOW! HEAVEN NOW!" were parting words upon the failing lips.

During the period of its serial publication, the Tale gained universal commendation: and, as the Editor of "HOME WORDS," I have not been surprised by the repeated requests which have been urged for its separate publication.

In yielding to these requests I may add, the late Earl of Shaftesbury most readily evinced his appre-

ciation of the Tale by allowing it to be dedicated to himself.

Lord Shaftesbury well earned the title of *THE WORKING MAN'S FRIEND*; and he bore no title which reflected greater honour on his noble character. No one ever did more than his lordship to vindicate the Rights of *LABOUR*; and it is almost needless to say he was ever equally ready to assert and maintain the Right of *SUNDAY REST*:—to use his own expressive and exhaustive words,—“the full, absolute, unqualified, and unconditional enjoyment by the working classes of one day in seven for the high and holy purposes for which the Day was set apart.”

I feel that I could not better commend “*HOLD FAST BY YOUR SUNDAYS*” to the hearty reception of my working friends, than by quoting the following extract from a speech delivered some years since by Lord Shaftesbury in the City Hall, Glasgow, to a crowded assembly of the members of “The Glasgow Working Men’s Sabbath Protection Association.” His lordship said :—

“Well did one of your countrymen call this ‘The Pearl of Days.’ As the Pearl of Days let it be precious to you—the single goodly pearl of all the pearls you could seek on earth. (Applause.)

“I am glad to see you, free, honest, and independent citizens, rising to the assertion of the exercise of your political rights; it is constitutional; it gives hope of the country in which we live. But if you rise to the assertion of your political rights, how trumpery, how mean, how unworthy of consideration are they when compared with those rights which assert the

sanctity of the Lord's Day! You may busy yourselves on weekdays in your works of industry; you may busy yourselves in your political assemblies, or in regard to the exercise of the suffrage and the tone of the men who should represent you in Parliament; but I ask you, What are these rights compared with the right that you assert, to have this great and sacred Day exclusively your own, for the contemplation of God's Holy Word, for waiting upon Him in worship, for repairing all the wear and tear of the mind and body in the work that is prescribed, for refreshing yourselves for future toil, but, above all things, preparing yourselves, through the all-redeeming blood of the Saviour, for a blessed immortality? These are the great rights for you to maintain; these are the great rights that raise you to the full sense of your responsibility to God and man.

"I have read an article in one of your local papers to-day. I do not complain of its tone, on the contrary I took it as rather friendly than otherwise; but it speaks as if you had called me down here, and I had come in the most willing manner, for the purpose of putting some restriction upon the ordinary pleasures you enjoy. Above all, the writer went out of his way to say that it was to limit the poor people in their walks on the Sabbath Day. Now I look upon the Sabbath Day as a day of holy, physical, and mental recreation; I look upon it as a day of which you must devote a good part to the worship and service of Almighty God (hear, hear); but I look upon it as a day that you may devote to family affections, to many family duties, to social intercourse,

to many little innocent enjoyments ; and if there is anything on the face of the earth that to my mind is more beautiful than another, it is to see on the Sabbath Day, under the bright sun and on a glowing evening, the working-man with his wife on his arm and his children behind him, all enjoying themselves under the open canopy of heaven. (Loud applause.)

“I ask you now to look at this picture,—I know we have it in London, and I hope you have it here in Glasgow,—Donald going out on the Sunday evening with his Jeannie upon his arm, nice and neat in her cap and kirtle, and all the bairns round about enjoying themselves. Then they go home ; then they read a chapter of the Word of God ; then they join in the common prayer, then they retire to bed ; and Donald rises next day and resumes his working clothes full of confidence and joy, because he knows he has spent well the Sabbath, and that God will be with him for the ensuing week. (Applause.)

“It is impossible, for those who will be candid enough to admit the truth, not to see and confess the wisdom of the institution of the Sabbath. A rest of one day in seven is so necessary, so true, and so wise, that it could not possibly have sprung from any human origin, but must have come down as a revelation, as an ordinance from heaven. (Applause.) Those who are most engaged in works of toil, whether it be of the brain or of the hand, call out for repose ; and if it be felt that rest is necessary to the human mind and the human body, I ask you if there ever was a period in the history of the world, in the history of this nation, when it was more necessary than at

the present moment? (Applause.) Is it not an observation of every one, that we are living with immense rapidity? Is it not an observation of every one, that we are crowding into the year the events of a century? Everybody knows that in the days in which we live the moral system, the intellectual system, is more greatly disturbed than ever, owing to the wild competition in every department of trade and art in which men's minds are so busily engaged. Therefore it is important that we should be more than ever circumspect in attending to God's great ordinance, and give up exclusively to Him, without let, or hindrance, or restraint, the whole of that blessed Day, apart from the toil of the mind and of the body.

"We do not want to impose upon others any ascetic observance; only we do not choose to be deprived of that privilege ourselves. We are not called by any Act of Parliament to attend places of worship; but we say, 'You shall not do anything on your part that shall prevent any working-man from attending a place of worship.' (Applause.) It is for working-men to maintain their right to the Sabbath for themselves; and that right the law of the land has established. But I wish to impress this upon you: Do not trust only to the law. What I want is, that working-men should create a sound, healthy, and strong public opinion (hear, hear); and if we once get public opinion to prevail in our land, we shall succeed in making a true and God-fearing, Sabbath-keeping population.

"Let me add, I have the greatest possible attach-

ment, almost next to the observance of the Sabbath itself, to the Saturday half-holiday, to which I cannot help thinking a species of sanctity attaches. (Hear, hear.) I think the Saturday half-holiday ought to be given to all classes, because I believe it would be one of the best means of securing the full, free, and decent observance of the Lord's Day." (Applause.)

The working-men of England will know how to appreciate these earnest and eloquent words of faithful counsel ; and the response in many a God-fearing reader's breast will be a renewed resolve to

HOLD FAST BY OUR SUNDAYS.

The Editor of "HOME WORDS."

Coomrith, Bournemouth.

August, 1889.



LIFE'S SAVINGS BANK.

THE Sabbath is God's special present to the working man; and one of its chief objects is to prolong his life, and to preserve efficient his working tone. It replenishes the spirits, the elasticity, and vigour, which the last six days have drained away, and supplies the force which is to fill the six days succeeding. In the economy of life it answers the same purpose as in the economy of income is answered by a Savings Bank.

The frugal man who puts aside a pound to-day, and another pound next month, and who, in a quiet way, is always putting by his stated pound from time to time, when he grows old and frail, not only gets the same pound back again, but a good many pounds beside. And the conscientious man, who husbands one day of existence every week; who, instead of allowing the Sabbath to be trampled and torn in the hurry and scramble of life, treasures it devoutly up, the Lord of the Sabbath keeps it for him, and in length of days, and a hale old age, gives it back with usury.

The Savings Bank of human existence is the weekly Sabbath.—*North British Review.*



OUR FATHER'S HOUSE.

Blest day of God, most calm, most bright,
The first and best of days;
The labourer's rest, the saint's delight,
A day of joy and praise.

GLAD TIDINGS.

The first-fruits do a blessing prove
To all the sheaves behind,
And they that do a Sabbath love,
A happy week shall find.—MASON



—•••••

CHAPTER I.

“HOLD FAST BY YOUR SUNDAYS!”



MY father uttered these words one Sabbath evening, many years ago. I can scarce tell how many. I was a mere lad then, and life lay all before me in a kind of golden halo, such as never appears but once, and that is in the days of our youth.

My life had been a happy one : I cannot, up to this period, recall any sorrow of much magnitude. We were working people, and from Monday morning till Saturday night we kept strict count of the words, “Six days shalt thou labour.” My father had been

in the employ of the squire of the parish ever since I could remember, and long before that. At the close of every week, he came home with his honest earnings, and put them into my mother's hands, to be appropriated to the use of the family.

It was astonishing how far the earnings went. Two household friends, named thrift and economy, would spin them out to the last farthing. My mother was a capital manager. Neither head nor hands were ever idle. Within the home, all things were kept clean and bright; "Cleanliness," she used to say, "is the luxury of the poor." And we had good food and clothing, and many little comforts besides, which were unknown to those of our neighbours whose affairs were not managed with the same prudence and skill, and who would drop their earnings into the pocket of the landlord of the inn, instead of into their own.

"This kind of privation is not sent by Providence," my father would say, if ever the subject were referred to. "The means of preventing it are bestowed upon us. We have strong hands, if only we had willing hearts. It comes of our own unruly wills and passions."

And then, for he was a man deeply versed in holy things, he would speak of the blessings of piety in the home, and the safety and prosperity of those who dwell under the shadow of the Almighty, and are kept from all kind of evil.

I used to listen to him with reverence. It was a teaching with which I had been familiar from my childhood upwards, but I did not enter very deeply

into the matter. The root of it lay beyond the limit of my experience.

Sunday was our happiest day. How well I can remember it, and all the little incidents connected with it! It comes to me, through all these years, with the freshness of yesterday. I can scent the old woodbine that clung lovingly round the cottage porch, and with its companion, a white rose, used to look, in summer time, through the window. I can recall the casement, with its muslin curtain, old and darned, but spotless in its whiteness. I can see the clock in the corner, and the well-polished table, with the best tea-tray leaning against the wall; and the row of books, my father's humble library, well worn with use. And I can see the strip of garden, with its bed of sweet-williams and mignonette; and the patch of potatoes, and the row of peas, and the bee-hives under the wall; and the gate leading into a smooth green meadow, over which we went to church; and the old, weather-beaten tower itself, peeping from behind a clump of trees.

Sunday was essentially a holiday. Besides its sacred character, and the deeper, holier rest, of which I then knew but little, it came to us with a genial smile. Our week-day work was done. My father's tools,—his spade, his fork, his hoe, the implements with which he had toiled, day after day, tilling, sowing, reaping, as it might happen,—were laid aside. The horses in the meadow grazed contentedly, or stood hanging their heads over the gate, secure from harness.

The Sabbath-bells, as they chimed in the early

morning, had but one message. They seemed to say "Rest! rest! rest!"

In these days I cared little for rest. I was active, and had all the restlessness of youth. My limbs never tired, my head never ached. I was full of the busy schemes and plans of boyhood. But I loved these happy Sundays. The memory of them is precious to me now, though the snows of age have fallen thickly on my head, and I am approaching, through God's mercy, another Sabbath, far away from here!

The period when my story begins, was an eventful one. It was the last Sunday at my old home. I was about to go into the world, and fill up my humble place amid its busy scenes. My father had resolved to give me a trade, and he had bound me apprentice to an upholsterer in the next market town. It was a very subordinate position to begin with. I was to run errands, and make myself useful in any way that might be required. But this was supposed to lead to better things.

"If the lad works well, and is steady, we shall soon push him on," was the promise held out by my employer.

So, on the morrow, these new scenes were to dawn upon me. I was to be ushered into a new sphere.

I liked the thoughts of the change;—what lad of fourteen would not? The town, with its bustling streets and gay shop-windows, had long been regarded with a beating heart. That roseate hue I spoke of rested on the new stretch of life's journey, and gave it a fictitious charm. The uphill work, the cares, the

snares, the pitfalls, with which life abounds, lay hidden. One by one, I have come upon them since. I have seen the halo flee as I approached, and the bare rugged path lie steep before me, reaching I knew not whither.

But at the time of which I speak, it was not so: my knowledge had not come; the lesson was not taught.

My father was well acquainted with life. He knew by experience where danger lurked and where safety was to be found. And he put before me certain places of refuge, certain towers of strength, when he said,—

“Hold fast by your Sundays!”

The day was almost over when he said it. We had attended our evening service, and my father was sitting at the window, the open Bible on his knee. He had been reading until the twilight closed in around us, and then, as was our custom, we had sung a hymn.

“Lord, we Thy people hail the Day
Which breathes of peace and love,
Which bids our toils and cares away,
And tells of rest above.

We love the soothing Sabbath bell;
We love the House of Prayer;
Sweet thoughts and hopes within us swell,
While we are gathered there.

Lord, for Thy Day we bless Thy Name,—
Thy law hath made it sure;
It stands from age to age the same,—
The birthright of the poor.

Oh may these firstfruits of our time,
These Sabbath seasons, be
Bright steps up which our souls may climb,
Till they are safe with Thee !”

My mother joined in our simple melody, but I fear her thoughts wandered from it. She was about to part with her son, and there was a touch of sadness on her spirit. I could see her wipe away a tear that now and then trickled down her cheek ; and when I had retired to rest, she came to my bedside and, stooping over me, kissed me.

“Harry,” she whispered, “be sure you remember what your father says about the Sunday.”

“That I will, mother,” I replied confidently.

“Make no vows in your own strength,” she said, “for it is just weakness. But pray to God to help you and keep you in the right way. There is more in the Sunday than you think.”

The words were but partially understood, though I thought of them many times. It was the outer sanctuary in which I had a dwelling : the veil had not been lifted from the Holy Place within.





CHAPTER II.

MY NEW PLACE.



“OW, Harry, keep close behind me. This is the way to your new place.”

As my father spoke, almost before he had time to utter the words, I had alighted from the carrier's cart, our humble conveyance, and was standing looking about me. The journey had seemed very tedious, and the stoppages endless, as we had passed through the villages. But time and patience last out many things, and here we were.

My new place! I see it now. A shop in a crowded thoroughfare, piled with upholsterers' goods, with chairs, tables, and sofas, some of them bulging out on the pavement; and a narrow gangway left between the goods, so narrow, that my father and I could but just squeeze ourselves along, one behind the other, on our way down the shop. And a great barn-like place at the back, called the “workshop,” that we could see

into, and that was full of chairs and tables in the process of being made, some legless and armless, and some of them mere rough blocks of wood.

A lad, of my own age, was in the shop, and came forward to receive us. He was as spruce and dapper as I was homely and countrified. There was a great looking-glass just opposite, in which both our figures could be seen, and mine did not gain much by the contrast. And he had a readiness of speech too that I did not possess. In a few minutes he had told us that he was leaving that very day, to go to a grand new shop in the market-place, and that he had been living here six months, and that I was to fill his place, and many other things beside; to which my father seemed to pay but little attention.

As for me, I rather took to the lad from the first, and felt sorry he was going.

Presently my new master came out,—a little wiry man, with a certain briskness and activity about him that I liked; for I was used to brisk stirring ways at home. “Never let the grass grow under your feet,” “Make hay while the sun shines,” and many such-like proverbs, were frequent sayings of my father. “If God gives us rest on the Sabbath,” he would argue, “it is a stringent command, ‘Six days shalt thou labour.’ And labour,” he would go on to say, “is a blessing, Harry, not a curse; health, wealth, and peace are hers; the seed-time and the harvest, the basket and the store. It is through idleness of the hands that the house droppeth through; for idleness neither sows nor reaps, has neither storehouse nor barn.”

While my father and my new master went forward into a little room behind the shop, talking, I suppose, about myself, we young ones lagged behind. I waited to look about me, and I liked to hear what the talkative lad had to say about the new place I had come into.

There was no need to ask many questions: he talked on with a glibness that was surprising. He contrived, in the few minutes we were together, to tell me that this was the worst end of the town, and the place to which he was going the best; that this shop was "a poky affair," but his shop was the grandest in the town; that I should find myself "cooped up" and "precious dull;" that there was a park at the other end, and a river with lots of boats on it; and his speech was garnished with many slang terms that I did not understand. On the whole, however, I liked him, and was rather flattered by the interest he seemed to take in me.

My village companions were very humdrum sort of lads compared to this one. And he might be my companion, even though we were not under the same roof.

But in spite of my liking for him, it must be confessed that there were points about my new friend that I felt were rather questionable. When he asked where I should go on the Sunday, and I told him to the parish church, he laughed, and said he did not mean that. I could not find out what he did mean, for at that moment out came my father.

"Now, Harry," he said, briskly, "I have settled all about you: this is your new master."

I made the kind of bow I used to do at home, in presence of a superior. Then I looked up into his face. It was rather a careworn face, I thought, and belonged to a person that I feared was hard to please. But Mr. Gibson (that was his name) was an old friend of my father's, and I knew that he must be the right sort of man. I had full confidence in my father as regarded everything.

And yet, how was it that the words "cooped up," "dull kind of place," "queerish chap," and many such expressions came unpleasantly to my mind? I did not entertain them; indeed, there was no chance just then. My father had some errands to do, and nothing was more delightful than his proposal that I should go with him.

A brisk walk through the town on a sunshiny day—could anything be better? There were the shops—the market-place—the great broad handsome streets—the beautiful sparkling river—the park, filled with gaily-dressed people, who looked as if taking a holiday. Everything was novel and delightful; and I was to stay here—to live among these grand new things always!

When we came back, it did strike me that our shop, as I had already begun to call it, was in the worst part of the town. The streets were very narrow, and the pavement bad, and the general aspect of the place inferior. Again I remembered my new friend's remarks, and I felt a trifle disappointed. I had seen his shop in the market-place, and admired, as we passed, the curtains and mirrors and grand ornaments, far beyond what our place could boast.

And I felt a twinge of envy. I had hoped, on our return, for a little further conversation ; but my new friend was gone.

Nobody was at home now but my master and a comfortable-looking person, his housekeeper, who was also his niece ; for my master had lost his wife many years ago.

Ruth was the name of the housekeeper ; and she took me upstairs to show me my room, a tiny closet of a place in the attic, but very clean and snug. My box stood under the window, as if it had already taken possession. I could see nothing from the window but chimney-tops and smoke.

We had dinner when I got downstairs ; and then my father said it was time to go, and I walked with him to the carrier's cart, and bade him good-bye.

"Now, Harry," he said, "you have your future prospects in your own hands, lad. There is a good old proverb, that 'God helps those who help themselves.' And, Harry," he added, a minute later, as we stood in a quiet place apart from the busy crowd, and while the carrier was putting in his horse, "be sure you pray that God will keep you from temptation. A big town, like this, is a dangerous place for a lad, unless he is in God's keeping. But he'll be safe enough then."

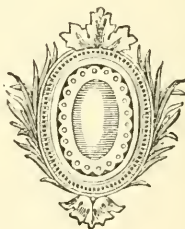
"I will pray," I said, all the pious influences of my early years coming upon me, and standing, as they often do, in the place of a surer restraint ; "I will strive."

"That's right ! and God bless you !"

I felt his hand on my head a moment, and then it

was drawn hastily over his eyes. After that, we parted. The carrier's horse set off at its usual jog-trot pace, and I was left alone. I had fairly started in life.

I walked briskly back to my new home, which was in the next street. I hardly knew for the moment, whether I was glad or sorry: whether I felt most inclined to laugh or to cry. At any rate, I looked about, in a wistful sort of way, for my new friend. The sight of his merry face, I thought, would have done me good. But it was not to be seen.





CHAPTER III.

"THE *MAY* DO, AND THE *WILL* DO."



SOON found out the reason why my father had placed me with Mr. Gibson.

Andrew Gibson, as he was called by his employers, was the best and most finished workman in the town. The articles of furniture supplied by him were said by a well-known figure of speech, to "last for ever."

He was a capital man of business. "Business," he used to say, "has two hands and two feet. Civility and attention are the hands, diligence and perseverance the feet."

There is a "may do," and a "will do," he used also to say, as we plied our tasks. The "may do" can shuffle lamely by in a crowd, and so contrive to pass; but the "will do" looks you in the face like an honest man.

I made up my mind from the beginning to strive after the "will do." I wanted to learn my trade well,

and be a good workman and a useful member of society. These were my first and fairest intentions.

I led a happy life, though the days went with the regularity of clock-work. I rose with the lark, and used to be in the workshop whistling merrily, and as busy as a bee.

"Take time by the forelock," was another of my master's sayings. "It is of no use trying to catch him. He goes like the wind when once he has started."

My master's establishment was a small one. He employed no more hands than were needed, and nothing was for show, but all for use. In the workshop were some half-dozen men, who went home to eat and to sleep. And within doors there was Ruth.

Ruth made us very comfortable. The room in which we lived was plain as could be, but it was clean and neat, and the meals were served with the quietness and regularity of my own home. My master, Ruth, and myself, composed the family circle, and we began to feel as if knit together by a closer bond than that of interest. My master treated me more like a son than an apprentice.

"I had a son once," he said to me, one day, "just such a lad as you are ; but he has left me."

I asked Ruth what was the meaning of this speech ; and she told me that the lad was not dead, as I had supposed, but had run away to sea, and nobody had heard of him since.

I thought of this many times, when my master was grave and silent, as he would be by fits and starts. I fancied he was grieving for his son.

We used to attend church on Sunday morning, all three of us ; Ruth locking the door and taking the key in her pocket. In fine weather, Ruth and I would take an afternoon stroll into the fields, or into some quiet lane, and my master would sit at home reading. His legs, he said, were not so young as they used to be ; and when we came back we often found him asleep, with his handkerchief over his head, and his glasses on the great book in which he had been reading. It was always the same book—the Bible.

These were peaceful days, and it seemed an easy injunction to "Hold fast by my Sundays ;" but I was yet all untried, and the hour of temptation had not come.

One day, as I was going along the street on an errand, I heard some one calling after me.

"What a hurry you are in !" said a voice close to my elbow—a voice I remembered to have heard before. "What is it all about ?"

I stopped. It was my acquaintance of the shop, the sharp lad who had gained my favour the first day of my arrival, but whom I had not seen since.

The sight of him brought back the old feeling of liking. I held out my hand cordially. He was just as lively as ever, and talked away as fast as possible. "What had I been doing with myself ?" "How did I like my place ?" And a hundred questions more. And though I resisted a little, he would have me go round the corner to look at *his* shop, and then farther still, to have a peep at the river, all glittering in the sun, and with pleasure boats sailing upon it. A little

way farther was the Park ; and a band was playing merrily under the trees. But I steadfastly refused to go another step. "I must go back," I said ; and I did, running as fast as I could to make up for lost time.

But the conversation that had taken place between us, left a curious impression on my mind. The gaiety and light-heartedness of my companion's manner, his love of fun and of frolic, roused up something of the same sort in myself. This was innocent enough, and did me no harm. But the hints and speeches he dropped, the allusion to pleasures I never had the leisure to enjoy, and to a liberty I had never before wanted, or felt to need, were neither good nor wholesome. They were rather like drops of poison too minute to be observed, but the result of which would be felt.

When I got back from my errand, it struck me for the first time that the place was dull and gloomy : that my way of life was monotonous, and had not sufficient variety ; that I was at work from morning till night, and had not the enjoyments and pastimes of other lads. Many more such thoughts would have crowded into my mind, but that occupation, and the brisk polishing I was giving to a certain set of drawers, caused them to flee away. By degrees, and when my task was completed, I felt as happy and as contented as ever.

But it chanced after a time,—and I must not dwell too long on this part of my story,—it chanced that I met Peter Clarke (for this was the name of my new acquaintance) again and again. I never went out on

an errand, but his merry face was sure to meet me at the corner of the street ; and by slow but dangerous degrees we became very intimate indeed. I had never been so taken with a companion before. He could do almost everything ; and, as it seemed to me, he knew almost everything. I thought he was the cleverest lad I had ever met with in my life.

He had some friends—"a jolly set," he used to call them, and by degrees I became acquainted with every one of them. These stolen interviews took place when I went on errands, or when I was left in charge of the shop.

"It was not right," something told me. "These lads were each of them in the employ of a master, and it was his time which they were wasting."

Still the few merry minutes, the jest, the song, had a kind of charm for me. When it was over, I was sad and depressed in a manner unknown to me before. I was fretful too, and impatient. I lost by the exchange, as people always do who give up right for wrong, good for evil. And it was wrong, or why should I have kept silence to those who had been my best and kindest friends ? Why did I say not a word of these things to my master or to Ruth ?





CHAPTER IV.



THE MOTTO STARED ME IN THE FACE.

THE kind of life I was leading could not be without its effect on me. Outwardly, I went on pretty much as usual; but there were certain gaps and breaks in my chain of duty. I wanted to "get out" more than I used to do. The society of my master and of Ruth had not excitement enough. I was always planning how to see or speak to "my friends."

I did not care so much for my trade, or to be the best workman in the place. I was longing rather for a time when I could get those holidays and those pleasures of which my companions were constantly telling me: when I should have less work and more play.

Many were the pitying speeches made to me, and I began to pity myself very much indeed. Yet in my better moments, I was ashamed of myself. A healthy,

heartly lad, with strong arms and a good trade and a happy home : what more could I want ?

I often had this kind of reflections as I passed some shivering urchin in the street on a winter's day, and I could not but recall the hymn—

“Not more than others I deserve,
Yet God has given me more.”

At such times I would shake off my discontent, and set myself to work with all my might.

But Winter was over now. Spring had come, and with it came my first great temptation.

I had been gradually falling away. I had been more and more won to my companions, and to their ways of thinking and of acting. I had seen them at all times when it was practicable. I had listened eagerly to their schemes ; and when their great scheme came to be disclosed, it did not shock me as might have been supposed.

Yet it was a plan for an excursion down the river on a Sunday. There was something exciting in the word “excursion.” It was just what I had been longing for, this beautiful Spring weather. I had never been on the river but once. That once was a holiday afternoon, and my master and Ruth and I had made a merry little party on the water ; and we went a long way down in a boat, and had tea at a quiet inn by the water-side. I had never enjoyed myself more in my life. But should I enjoy this trip, and on a Sunday ?

The trip proposed would be very different from that “slow affair,” as Peter Clarke called it. There

was to be a party of six, and we were to stop, not at the quiet inn, but at some tea-gardens lately opened, and where a great deal of merriment was always going on.

My father, I well knew, would have disapproved of the scheme from beginning to end. But from the point on which I stood, I had lost sight of my father, and the pious home in which I dwelt. I saw, instead, the gay flowing river, alive with holiday parties and pleasure-seekers; and my fancy depicted a scene of enjoyment in which I was to take a part.

And on a Sunday!

The difficulty in my mind was how to persuade my master into letting me go. I did not mention this to my companions, for I dreaded their gibes and jeers; but I thought it over as I walked back to the shop.

It was clear to me that if I told him the truth, it would be the same thing as giving up my holiday. But could I bring myself to tell a lie?

I was still debating the point when I reached the door of the shop. Ruth was looking out for me. Her uncle, she said, was in the parlour, and wanted to speak to me.

Ah! that guilty conscience! It needed but those few words to make my face red and my heart beat. Had my master found out my scheme? And was this the reason why he was waiting to speak to me?

I went trembling into the room where my master sat, his great ledger on the table before him.

"Harry," he said, "I find that I shall have to take a journey. My only brother is dangerously ill, and has sent for me. I shall have to set off in the morning."

The morning was Saturday. My heart, that had failed me with fear, gave a great bound. I could hardly tell why, but it seemed a relief—this news my master had just told me.

"I must be back on Monday, in time for business," he went on to say. "Ruth will go with me, but we can trust you to keep house while we are away."

The unsuspecting smile made me wince as with pain; but I said nothing.

"You can attend the morning service, as usual," continued my master; "but I would rather you kept in the rest of the day. There is a great fair going to be held, and many loose people have come into the town. I should not like the place to be left."

"Very well," I said quietly.

He looked up at me with the same unsuspecting smile.

"It will be your turn next," he said kindly. "I must spare you to go home for a Sunday, soon."

"Thank you, sir," I replied.

I had the handle of the door in my hand, and kept twisting it round and round. I was anxious for the conversation to come to an end; and it did. My master went back to his ledger, and I retired to the shop.

I wondered what I should do. The more I thought about it, the more ardently I desired the holiday; and after all, what could be more convenient? Events played into my hands. My master was going out of the way, as it seemed, on purpose!

I can slip out, I argued to myself, and fasten the doors behind me. No one will ever find out I

have been, and there will be no need to tell a lie about it.

I did not stay to argue the case fairly out, or to reflect on the good old saying, that "one sin leads to another;" or to discuss with myself how I should face my master when he came back, having been unfaithful to my trust. I did not care to dwell on these things. I kept my secret very safe, and the boys contrived to let me know the hour of starting, and the place where we were to meet.

I got up earlier than usual on Sunday morning, and laid out my best clothes and brushed my hat. The house was very still, for my master and Ruth were gone, and I had it all to myself. I was eager and excited now the pleasure was so near. My hand shook as I hunted to the bottom of my trunk in search of something I wanted, tumbling everything over in my impatience. The thing I wanted did not come, but I got hold of a book my mother had put in, and which I had never opened. As I tossed it carelessly on one side, a marker fell out, and lay on the floor just where I could not help but see it. The marker was worked with coloured silk, no doubt by my dear mother's own hands. The motto stared me full in the face—

"HOLD FAST BY YOUR SUNDAYS!"





CHAPTER V.



THE OFFICE OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD.

PICKED up the marker, and sat down with it in my hand. If it had been gifted with the power of speech, it could not have appealed to me more forcibly. Yes; my mother had planned this little gift, and put it there as a surprise. She was a good needle-woman, and made gowns and bonnets, in a plain way, for her neighbours: and she was fond of making little ornaments like this. She had worked a marker for the great Bible out of which my father read every morning and night. But that marker had a different motto.

It came before me in a moment—my dear happy home—just at this very hour. The Sabbath sun shining on the window, and the Sabbath bells chiming; and my father reading the Word of God, and offering prayer, perhaps for me! And his parting words, repeated with such earnestness: “Hold fast by your Sundays.”

Sunday, as he esteemed it, was not a day for idle mirth and pleasure and feasting. What did it mean, I wondered, as I sat on the edge of the bed—the Sabbath kept as my father kept it? It meant—and conscience answered readily enough—it meant *rest*,—not for the body only, but rest for the soul; a period, when we can commune with God,—a state akin to one above, to the rest that remaineth for the people of God. I had heard my father say as much many times.

And where was I going, down this headlong path, away from all that was pure and holy? Where would it lead me?

A cloud seemed to come over the gay river, with its gladsome throng. The day's brightness was dim and dead. I put the marker back into its place. It was impossible, in the face of this silent rebuke, this voice from home, to persist in my Sabbath excursion. I had, in fact, given it up.

"Hold fast by your Sundays." I had done so as far as outward observance went. My place at church had never been vacant, and, after some indistinct fashion, I had been glad when they said unto me "Let us go up to the house of the Lord." But what of this present Sunday? Was I going to hold fast by it? As I took my solitary breakfast, I resolved what I would do. I was penitent for my past misconduct; and though there was a lingering regret, as the sunlight danced on the window and gave promise of a glorious day, still I was firm. I would *hold fast*, even by *this* Sunday. I would pass it as I should have done if the temptation had never occurred.

When the bells began their pleasant chime, I was ready. I took my Prayer-Book in my hand, the very marker placed within it, as though to keep me firm, and stepped quickly forward to church.

“The Lord is my Shepherd.”

My mind had wandered during the prayers. I had thought of my companions. They would not wait for me—that I knew—and at this moment they were in the full enjoyment of their holiday. I felt half-inclined to repent that I was not with them; but the text, given out in a clear, distinct voice, arrested my attention; I began to listen. I was more struck by that sermon than by any other I had ever heard. One sentence applied to my own case, as though the preacher knew what had happened to me.

“A word, a look, a text, will often stop a man from doing what he knows is wrong; and we are apt to say that *this* has saved him. But did you never think that, behind the word, or look, or text was One who gave it point and effect; One whose office it is to call back His wandering sheep; even the ‘Lord our Shepherd’?”

I had been saved from doing wrong, I thought, as I walked home, by a simple motto, brought suddenly before me; but what power could there be in those few words to break through a settled purpose and hinder me from sin?

Might there not have been standing by, close to me, though I knew it not, One who gave effect to the words,—even the “Lord our Shepherd”?

I was much softened as I recalled what had been said of the love of Christ; of His seeking and saving

those that were lost ; of His tenderness in gathering the lambs in His arms, and carrying them in His bosom ; and of the price He paid that sinners might be brought home to God. All these things had been dwelt upon in the sermon.

I was glad I had not joined the party on the river. My companions had been to seek for me, for I found a crumpled bit of paper pushed under the door. They had waited half an hour, and they wanted me to come after them. I threw the paper in the fire. The whole affair had been one of those critical periods in a life, when good and evil seem balanced by a single hair !

I did not find the day so lonely as I expected. I read as much as I could, and I wrote a letter to my father ; and then, I sat at the window and watched the people go by to church, and listened to the bells.

When it grew dark, I closed the shutters and lighted the gas. Just as I had done so, a party of noisy revellers came down the street, and hammered rudely at the door. I knew who they were, and that my companions had returned from their excursion ; and I knew also—and it gave me a shudder—that some of them had passed the bounds of temperance. This visit to me was nothing less than a drunken frolic. I did not make any sign, but sat quite still in my chair, and thanked God for His mercy in saving me from a fate like this !





CHAPTER VI.

RUTH COMES BACK ALONE



MONDAY morning dawned, bright and clear. I shook off my sleep, and sprang hastily up, just as the sun was gilding the tall chimneys and peaked roofs opposite. I felt cheerful as a lark. My mind was vigorous, my body rested and refreshed. How should I have been, I asked myself, if, instead of that quiet Sabbath, I had spent the day upon the river? I could picture the result—the weariness, the dread of detection, the burden on the conscience, the downhill course, one step of which had been taken.

It was worth anything to have this quiet conscience, this sense of security, this fear of nothing.

I had never missed my morning prayer, though it had often been hurried over; but the Sabbath by which I had been enabled to “hold fast,” seemed to have left a savour on my spirit. I knelt down and prayed earnestly.

There was a path—of which I had been taught from my youth up—a path of safety and of blessedness. I began to think that, with God's help, I would endeavour to walk in it. Something was inclining me to do so—something I had met with in the house of God and carried away in my heart. Was it the good seed—the little leaven which would leaven the whole lump?

One thing I resolved upon: I would get free from my bad companions, and shake off both their advice and their company. And I recalled a passage in the Bible that applied to this very resolve: "My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not." Another thing I made up my mind to do: I would no longer withhold my confidence from my master and from Ruth. Though I should have to speak with shame and confusion, I would tell them the whole story.

They would be home for breakfast, and I bustled about to get everything ready. The men had come to the workshop, and found "all right and tight," as I heard one of them say. And when I had made my little preparations indoors, I went into the shop and began to polish up the furniture, whistling all the time. The Sabbath rest seemed to have given me a double measure of strength and vigour. "Perhaps it is so," I thought, for my mind was still inclined to dwell on the subject; and I recalled my dear mother's words: "There is more in the Sunday than you think."

When I heard the pony-trap, that my master used, come rattling down the street, I ran out to meet it. But only Ruth alighted at the door. She looked

very sad, and told me that the Sunday had been a melancholy one for them. My master's brother was getting near his end ; and my master was staying with him until all was over, and had sent Ruth home by herself.

Their only comfort, she said, as she looked around the room, and noticed what I had been doing—their only comfort was in thinking that they had left the place in good hands, for they both placed the utmost confidence in me.

I turned very red at this speech.

"Ruth," I said, "I have not been as you think I have been wicked and deceitful ; and if it had not been for the mercy of God in restraining me, I should have fallen into open sin."

And, in answer to her look of surprise, I told her all.

She listened attentively, and with an anxious expression on her kind face. As I finished, a tear came into her eye.

"Ruth," I said, "you will never trust me again."

"Yes," was her reply, "I shall trust you ; for I think that God is dealing with you as He does with many of His erring children. He follows them in their wanderings, and brings them back to the fold. Once there, Harry, the poor terrified sheep has no more wish to stray."

And then, as we sat at breakfast, Ruth talked to me as my own dear mother would have done. And she told me that the sick relative she had just quitted found the utmost solace in religion ; and that, when a lad of my age, he had been tempted to go astray.

but God in His providence had stopped him ; and, all through his after career, religion had been his guide and his stay.

“And Harry,” she said, earnestly, “if I were you, I would make up my mind, *now*, at this very time, to serve the Lord ; it will bring you greater happiness than you ever imagined.”

I thought over the words many times, and it seemed as if some inward monitor kept pressing them upon my mind. “It will be a happy choice,” whispered this unseen counsellor ; “you will be safe in the keeping of an almighty Friend. Your sins will be forgiven ; you will be led and guided to your life’s end ; and then, you will join the company of holy men and angels above.”

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I am old now, as I said before, and my hair is silver-grey ; but as I look back through the varied scenes, some of which I am about to recount, I know that my first real impressions of religion date from this very time, when I resolved, by God’s grace, not in letter only, but in spirit and in truth, to “hold fast by my Sundays.”





CHAPTER VII.

SOMETHING UNEXPECTED HAPPENS.



AN element of change lies at the root of every step we take through this changeful world. The lesson is soon taught us; and it goes on being repeated year by year, almost from the cradle to the grave.

It was a lesson strongly brought before me at this time. Instead of resuming our usual routine, an unsettled period began. My master, it is true, returned the next day, for business obliged him to do so. But he soon started off again, and for a short time there was nothing but hurried journeys and anxious looking-out for tidings.

The invalid, contrary to all expectations, had somewhat rallied. There was not the slightest hope of recovery, Ruth told me; and it was a mere matter of time as to how long the spark would go on flickering ere it went out.

This unsettled period was fraught with much importance to myself and my inner world. I have

reason to believe, with gratitude and humility, that I was under the teaching of God's Holy Spirit. I found delight in prayer and in reading the Bible. I would rise early and sit up late to do so. And the Sabbath was looked forward to with eagerness, and its sacred hours were precious to me in a way they had never been before. Indeed, to express my meaning in a few words, the things I once lightly esteemed were all I now seemed to care for.

With this inner change came back the old desire to excel in my trade. I worked with increasing diligence, and tried in this time of anxiety to spare my master all the trouble in my power. It was only natural that this should be so; for religion, as I have long found out, must be a daily, practical thing, if it is to do anything for us.

At last, the event we had been expecting took place—suddenly, as such events often do in the end. My master's brother died, and my master and Ruth went away in a hurry, and stayed until after the funeral.

It never occurred to me, as I put everything in readiness for their return, that one change might bring another. I hoped we should now at least go back to our old peaceful days. But so it was not to be.

One evening, when work was over, my master sent for me. I had guessed that something was going on. Indeed, it had been reported among the neighbours that my master's brother had left some property behind him, and that my master would be better off in consequence. But beyond a casual speculation as

to whether he would use the money in new fronting the shop or increasing his business, I had not thought much about it.

My master was seated by the table in the little parlour, engaged, as it seemed to me, in writing letters. He pushed his desk aside as I came in. It was time, he said, to tell me what was going on, that I might not be taken unawares.

"I am amply provided for now, Harry," he continued; "and I have long wished to retire from business. I am getting an old man, and infirmities are coming fast upon me. If my son," and here he paused, "had been with me, I should perhaps have retired sooner. At any rate, the business would have passed into his hands. As it is, it must go to a stranger."

I had never thought of this. It seemed as if the ground were breaking up under my feet. The hint of such a thing was enough to make me more unsettled than I had ever felt in my life. And yet I was to remain in the old home, and go on the same as usual. This was arranged in due course of time between my father and my master.

"All you have to think of, Harry, is doing your duty," said my father.

A purchaser was soon found, for the business was a well-established and a thriving one; and the arrangements were made far too rapidly to suit my wishes. I clung to my dear master and to Ruth, and I felt the bitterness of separation would be great indeed. They would not even remain in the town, where I might now and then have seen them. They intended,

for the sake of Mr. Gibson's health, to live in the country.

I was very sore at heart. To have all the furniture carried away and the pleasant home broken up, was almost more than I could bear. But, in the midst of my trouble, it comforted me to think of "a Friend that sticketh closer than a brother." He would be my Guide and my Stay. I could not be lonely or forsaken while He was with me!

Preparations for removal soon began. The old-fashioned bureau, the eight-day clock that kept time to a minute, my master's easy chair, and the little table where Ruth sat at her work, were taken away; and in their place came other articles, smart and new, but which I did not like nearly so well. Instead of Ruth, there would be my new master's wife, who seemed a much grander and more important person than dear good Ruth had been.

As one part of the change, my own little attic underwent a complete metamorphosis.

It was newly papered and better furnished. But even this did not seem to content me. And when all was finished, I hung up by the wall a copy I had made of my dear mother's motto. I had done it on paper, with coloured ink. I wanted at this new period of my life to have the words always before me,

"HOLD FAST BY YOUR SUNDAYS."





CHAPTER VIII.

THE VOICE WAS THAT OF MY OLD ACQUAINTANCE

PETER CLARKE.



T was with a heavy heart that I stood watching at the window one fine summer's evening. My master and Ruth were gone, and the last link with the tranquil life I had enjoyed so long was snapped asunder. We had a sorrowful parting. Ruth had wept outright, and my master's eye was dim with a tear. Still they did their best to cheer and encourage me.

"You will often come to see us, Harry," they said ;
"and you will always meet with a welcome."

I was very sad when they were gone. I had some hours to myself, for my master and his wife were not expected until dusk. And though the place had been painted up, and new windows put into the shop, and everything done to improve it that could be, the very improvements seemed to make me feel more strange and less at home. Besides, the new comers

were entire strangers; I had scarcely exchanged a word with them.

They were young people, smart and good-looking, and what the neighbours called *pushing*. Indeed, the neighbours congratulated me on the change.

"Mr. Wilkins will do twice the business that Andrew Gibson did," they said, speaking of my new master.

There were speedily signs of the truth of this remark. The shop was filled with smart modern furniture, much more showy in appearance than the substantial articles it once contained. It is true that the smart things, as I shrewdly suspected from the first, were not so good, but they pleased the eye, and were much cheaper; and as a natural consequence, more persons would come to buy them.

"In fact, the shop looks 'like business now,'" said a well-known voice that roused me from my fit of musing.

I had not heard the voice for some time, but I recognised it in a moment. It was that of my old acquaintance, Peter Clarke.

We had not met for a long time, and I could not but perceive that he was much altered. The spruce, dapper appearance that took my fancy, was to a certain degree gone. His health had evidently not improved. His face was pale and thin, and had a careworn expression, remarkable in one so young. But he was as talkative and as boastful as ever.

He was not in the same place, he told me (passing over the reasons he had for leaving it), but he had got another quite as good, only not in that part of

the town. He intended to set up in business for himself some day. His father had promised to help him, and he should soon get to the top of the tree.

I listened to all this rattle with very different feelings from what I had first experienced. His looks seemed to belie his words, and I suspected that in reality he was neither prosperous nor happy. Indeed, I found out afterwards that his father had become too much impoverished, by the habits of his son, to be in a position to fulfil his promise, if indeed he ever made it.

At any rate, I could not hold my peace when he alluded to the memorable day of the Sunday excursion, and began to say how foolish I had been to shut myself out from it,—that “youth was the time for pleasure,”—and that “we came into the world to enjoy ourselves,”—and such-like remarks. I could not forbear asking him whether his real welfare, his health, or his peace of mind, or even his worldly position, was advantaged by these Sunday pleasures in which he took so much delight?

“As to that,” he said, but he hesitated a little, “as to that, I lead a merry life enough, and if I get run aground, and find myself at the last sixpence, I just write to my mother, and she helps me through.”

“But is it always convenient for her to help you through?” I asked.

“I know nothing about that;” and he laughed. “I know she keeps a hoard of money in an old stocking in the corner cupboard; I suppose she helps me out of that.”

“That hoard may not last very long,” I said, for

the idea of taking it struck me as something like robbery ; "and you have often said that your mother's health is failing."

"Oh, there is always something or other the matter with her," he replied, carelessly ; "but she is a good mother, and would rather go without herself than let me come to grief."

"If I were you," I said, earnestly, for I was pained more and more, "I would not touch a farthing of the money. I would begin to save, and have a stocking of my own."

He shrugged his shoulders contemptuously.

"I never was stingy, like you ; and I must have my holiday," he said. "Sunday was given us to do as we like with ; all the lads say so."

"But is what the lads say to be set against what the Bible tells us ?" I asked.

"The Bible ! Who thinks of troubling about the Bible, at our time of day ? It is only for people who have nothing else to do,—or, perhaps when one gets old."

"No, Peter," I said ; "the Bible is for you and for me,—and for us *now*, when we have our way to make in life, and to choose the good, and avoid the evil. It may perhaps be too late when we are old and hardened in sin."

"What a preacher you have become, Harry ! Well, I am content as I am. I mean to have a precious deal more fun before ever I turn religious ! And I must be off and write to my mother if I am to catch the post. Good day to you ! Good luck to you with your new master !"

So saying, he went whistling away as though he were light of heart. But in reality his mirth was like the crackling of thorns. I learned afterwards that at this very time he was in debt, and hardly knew which way to turn, or what he should do, if his mother refused to answer his letter.

How different would it have been if he had acted on the advice often given to me by my good master! "Begin by saving, not by spending," he used to say; and he had even induced me to put some of my earnings into the savings bank. "If you keep adding to your hoard," he would continue, "you will find that it keeps adding to you; and, in the end, you will get up the hill, instead of always remaining at the bottom."

I had not time, however, to go much into this question. The shrill whistle of the train was followed by the sound of wheels, as the omnibus came rattling down the street. My new master would be here directly.





CHAPTER IX.

THE GOLD AND THE DROSS.



IF I had felt strange before, I felt doubly so now. It is true that my master and mistress were good-natured people, and spoke kindly to me. But I could not expect it to be the same as when I welcomed back my dear old master and Ruth. Then I was one of the family, and there was as much to hear or to tell as if we had the same interests and had been the nearest relations. Now, after a few words of greeting had passed, I felt almost like an intruder, and was glad to retire to the shop, and busy myself there. I was sad at heart, and thought the place would never be the same again.

But I fell back on one of my father's excellent maxims: "All you have to do is your duty," he had said, "and no harm can happen to you." "Besides," I reflected, as I polished away vigorously, "I shall soon feel at home with them. It only wants a little

time. In a week or two we may be the best friends in the world."

It did not take long to be at home with my master. He came after me into the shop, and began to look about him, and to examine what he called, "the old stock," much of which was left. And here it was apparent from the beginning that his ideas and those of Andrew Gibson differed.

"Ah," he said, scanning the chairs and tables, and other articles, "they are not quite in my style. I want something run up quick for sale."

I looked at him with surprise.

"Yes," he said, nodding good-naturedly; "that's the kind of thing I want," and he pointed to a showy-looking chiffonier, one of the new articles sent in. "People don't care to lay out over much money in furnishing; they want something cheap and smart, and which makes a show."

"That chiffonier would not wear more than a couple of years," I replied, examining it with an eye that was now somewhat practised; "the wood is not seasoned."

"Never mind, let them come again. They can have two pieces of furniture for what one of Andrew Gibson's would cost."

This plan of selling cheap inferior goods did not suit my taste. It savoured too much of the "*may* do," instead of the "*will* do." However, it was no business of mine to argue the point with my master. I rather determined to exert myself more than ever, and, as far as in me lay, turn out the goods in a better style. I could not endure the idea of the

honest old business losing its character for producing articles substantial and good; and becoming noted for what was only showy and pretentious.

And here I must pause to remark, that it was the greatest blessing to me that I had become decided for God. No other principles, but those based on the religion of Jesus Christ, could have kept me steady and firm in the difficult times that were coming. Mere human strength would soon have given way, and I should have drifted along with the stream.

I was anxious to know what kind of Sundays would fall to my lot in these new days. Nothing could be allowed to interfere with the deep and holy rest which I began at this period to enjoy—a rest which gave vigour to the whole man, quickened me in every duty, and gilded the week with a mild and blessed radiance.

But hitherto, the outward circumstances of the Sabbath had been so happy. The bonds of Christian fellowship had knit us together as in one heart and one mind. The day was marked by order, quietness, and regularity. I feared the opposite would be the case, when I rose on Sunday morning, and there was no symptom of any one stirring. It is true, the week had been a busy one, and my master and mistress had gone to rest fatigued. But no preparations had been made for the Sabbath. There had lacked all those allusions to it which had been so welcome; and I had missed that short solemn prayer offered by my dear master at the close of the week, and which seemed to shut out the world, and cause the sacred hours to begin before their time.

Every moment I expected my mistress to appear ; but she did not, and I partook of the solitary breakfast, the bells ringing for church all the time.

Just as I was about to start, she came hurrying down.

"I am so sorry," she said good-naturedly. "I hope you have had your breakfast. Of course it is too late for *us* to think of going to church."

"I am afraid it is," I replied, as I brushed my hat and took up my Prayer-Book.

"Ah, well ; we don't often go in a morning," she resumed. "It's too much to expect from working people. My husband likes to lie and rest, and we have a bit of a holiday. Shall you dine at home, Harry?"

"I always have done so," I replied, rather surprised at the question.

She saw my perplexity, and hastened to say kindly—

"I don't want to turn you out ; you must make yourself quite at home with us. But I thought you had friends in the town, and would perhaps like a little pleasure on the Sunday."

It was very curious, I thought, as after some slight answer I walked hurriedly to church, that such a speech should be made to me. Thank God the temptation was not put before me a year earlier ! I should then have swum eagerly with the tide ; for God had not revealed to me those higher pleasures compared with which holiday-making on the Sunday is a grievous toil.

These reflections returned to me as I sat and

listened to the preacher. He was one of those good men who know how to bring heavenly things forcibly before the mind. The atonement of our Saviour, the work of the spirit of God in the soul, the necessity of leading a holy life, and the happiness of the world to come, were themes of which his hearers never tired. I make little pretence to education beyond the simplest kind ; but it seems to me that if every preacher were to do the same, and avoid, as a rule, topics which plain men cannot understand, more sinners might be converted to God, and believers built up in their most holy faith. At any rate, these sermons were to me like hidden manna, on which I could feed through the busy toils of the week.

I was little inclined to exchange the inward peace and satisfaction left by the Service for any other kind of pleasure. And yet on my return, the very treat I had once grasped at so eagerly was again offered. This time it was only offered to be refused. I felt not the slightest wish to join a party on the river ; I preferred keeping house by myself, and reading my Bible, and thinking over the topics which interested me so deeply.

No thanks to myself that I was thus enabled to refuse the evil and choose the good. The decision arose simply from the grace and power of God working in me, and opening my eyes to behold a better portion.

Who would refuse the gold and choose the dross, if he could rightly distinguish between them ?



CHAPTER X.

TO-MORROW IS THE DAY.



THE business which had been carried on for nearly half a century by Andrew Gibson had known but few fluctuations. "Steady and sure" might have been its motto. And the custom lay among substantial but rather old-fashioned persons, who had come again and again, and their children after them.

All this was changed. I was not surprised to find that by degrees our old customers left the shop. I did all I could to keep them. I worked as though the whole responsibility of the concern were upon my shoulders. I was at my post early and late, for I found to my regret that my master was not famous for his attention to business. He was a careless, good-tempered man, a merry companion, and sang a capital song at a dinner or a supper. He had a great deal of cleverness, but he lacked the steady perseverance which never fails to ensure success.

And the materials with which I had to do were altogether of another class. Cheap fancy articles were supplied that had no durability about them. They found plenty of customers. In place of our old friends came many new faces. We sold the goods as fast as they were made. There was no positive deception in the matter. The price asked was low, and could not be expected to insure the same amount of wear. I ventured sometimes to expostulate, but was met by the reply, always pleasantly spoken—

“We must go with the tide; people don’t care for that cumbrous style of furniture in these days. It has been superseded.”

Not in my opinion. Indeed I grew so dissatisfied, that but for my attachment to the place, and my desire to keep things together, I verily think I should have gone away. But I could not bring my mind to do so, and I went on striving and struggling, month after month, and as it happened, year after year.

I very soon found out that everything depended upon me. My master was rarely up when the shop was opened in the morning; and the vigilant eye so necessary in a house of business, was, as far as he was concerned, wanting. He would trust all to his work-people, and as a natural consequence, they took advantage. Indeed, as time passed away, I began to fear that if this state of things went on, in spite of our brisk trade, we should come to ruin.

Within the house it was not much better. No one could be more good-natured than my mistress, and the house was better furnished, and the meals more abundant; but the cleanliness and order and quiet,

that once made the charm of my daily life, were absent. My mistress was fond of dress and company, and though she had a wish to do her duty, the habit of steady careful industry was lacking. "Take care of the pence, and the pounds will take care of themselves," was a motto little regarded either by herself or her husband. Indeed, I felt sure that in spite of outward show, and an appearance of prosperity, they were getting poorer instead of richer.

One Christmas-time, I began to grow so uneasy that I pressed the matter on my master's attention. It was desirable, I told him, "to go over the books and take stock. Money seemed to go out faster than it came in."

"Ah!" he said, more gravely than usual, "my expenses are very great. But what can I do? How can I curtail them?"

I had been his right-hand man so long that I was able to speak with the utmost freedom.

"I think," I replied,—*"and do not be offended with me for the remark,—if you stuck closer to business——"*

"I never could," he said carelessly; "I was not cut out for it. Besides, you are always on the spot. The men look up to *you* more than they do to me."

"I am not the master," I began to say; but he cut me short.

"We'll talk the matter over another time, Harry. My wife and I are going a little jaunt into the country. To-morrow will be the day for looking over the books."

That period, so often promised, did not seem in-

clined to come. First one excuse was offered, and then another. I could not persuade my master to go steadily into his affairs. And yet I knew that in spite of my efforts they were becoming more and more complicated.

In the meantime, there marched full upon us an evil for which even I was hardly prepared. There came a very hard winter, such as the oldest man in the place had never before experienced. I cannot but pause to recall it. The snow lay thick on the ground for weeks, and the river was frozen as hard as iron. All kinds of trade and business suffered a check, and the distress was very great. Indeed, there happened a kind of panic, and many of our neighbours were unable to stand their ground, and had to close their shops and become bankrupt. These dark, sad days made me tremble; and they brought my master, in some degree, to his senses. The company, and the fine dressing within doors, ceased. My master grew thoughtful and depressed. Indeed, he might well do so, for but few customers came to the shop, and but few orders were sent in.

As the year advanced, the panic in trade did not pass away. Things grew worse rather than better. We were obliged to dismiss the workmen. There was already more stock than we hoped to get rid of, and we could not afford to pay money out when none was coming in. Those of our men who had been saving and thrifty suffered the least. They had some little hoard to fall back upon for a rainy day. Others had lived freely and saved nothing; on these the blow fell heavily indeed. We did all we could to

soften it, for my master was thoroughly kind-hearted, but the shoe was beginning to pinch ourselves. Nearer and nearer came the grim shadow that we dreaded to look at. It crept into the home; daily we saw symptoms of want in the empty till and the bare cupboard, and the disappearance of first one article and then another.

"You had better leave the ship, Harry, before she goes down," said my master to me one day; "we never can outride this storm!"

But I could not find it in my heart to do so. I clung to them in their distress; I had saved a little money, and the old business might right itself. It would never have been at this low ebb but for matters beyond my control. Carelessness and indolence had made the vessel leaky even before the tempest began. But this was no time for reproach, and I did not utter a single word.





CHAPTER XI.

AN ORDER! THE WORD HAD A WELCOME SOUND.



SEASON of adversity is met in different ways by different people.

Those who are under the influence of Divine grace find it a wholesome discipline. "The bitter is sweet, the medicine is food." Others taste no drop of healing in the cup.

Affliction on them has no salutary effect. On the contrary, it hardens and embitters them. The latter was the case with my master. His gay good-humour seemed to forsake him. Indeed, to use a homely expression, he went "from bad to worse."

Having no resource for the hours of leisure that were forced upon us, now our usual employments were suspended, he sought the company of those who were as listless and unoccupied as himself, and would be absent from morning till night. Often, he did not

return till after I was in bed ; for Mrs. Wilkins would never allow any one to sit up for him but herself. I partly guessed the reason of this ; for now and then the sound of angry voices and loud unseemly language would make its way up into my attic ; and the next morning Mrs. Wilkins would appear at breakfast, her eyes swelled up with crying.

What little remained of the business must have gone from him if some one had not stood in the gap. There was no one to do this but myself.

"If you forsake us, Harry," said my mistress again and again, "I cannot think what will become of us."

I had no wish to leave, though I was out of my time, and might have done so ; and to tell the truth, I began almost to despair. It seemed hard that my master, in spite of the lesson taught him by this painful crisis, still refused to attend to his own interests. It was impossible for me to avert the evil that must come should these practices continue.

One thing dwelt much on my mind. But for a restraining influence from above, I might have been in the same position. If that downhill step had once been taken, what would have been the result ? Surely it had been good for me to "hold fast by my Sundays."

One day my master came into the shop with a brisk step, and more cheerful than I had seen him for some time.

"Harry," he said, "we need not quite give up ; see, I have had an order come in."

An order ! The word had a welcome sound with it. It had not been spoken among us of late.

"Yes," he continued, "a famous order, too. One of the best I ever had in my life. It is for a complete set of furniture, made in rather a cumbrous style, and a little after Andrew Gibson's fashion. But the gentleman is an oddity, and is going to be married, and he wants the goods in a hurry."

"I suppose we can do it," I said, glad enough to hear such a piece of news.

"There is not much time given. But the question of ready-money turns upon our supplying the goods by a certain day. He is going abroad, and we shall have to wait till he comes back if we don't keep time. Now, it is just that ready-money, or the loss of it, that will make or mar us."

I quite agreed with that. I knew well the importance of this order to us, and how far it was beyond our expectations. Of course, we would set about it at once. We had had quite idle time enough to last for years.

But, from the beginning, I knew that it would be a tough business to complete the order by the day appointed. I warned my master of this, but he made light of it. "We have never been more certain of anything than of getting the goods off," he repeated again and again.

To do him justice, he applied his whole mind to the work in hand. He was up early and late, and scarcely allowed himself time to eat. But the details were rather tedious. I had learned to carve and gild, and had brought the art to some perfection, and my master expressed himself well satisfied with what I had done.

"But cannot you get on faster?" he often asked.

"Not to do it well," was my reply.

I was resolved on the "*will do*," come what might!

We had but few men on the premises, and that crippled us. In spite of our exertions, the work seemed to grow beneath our hands. We put on "steam," as Mr. Wilkins called it, and often sat up far into the night. My mistress would come in to see how we were getting on, and to bring us our meals. She herself was as busy as possible, for she had taken up her old trade of dressmaking, and her stitching-machine was plied at all hours. In fact, both indoors and out, we were on the full stretch.

It was an exciting period to us. Time passed quickly by, and the appointed day came very near indeed. With all our efforts we could not quite compass the end. We could not finish the goods, not even with the extra help we had been obliged to procure. Gradually, this fact stood out before us in the strongest light. Monday was the time for sending the furniture and receiving the prompt payment which had been held out as an inducement to all this extra labour. But it would not be possible to pack and send off the goods before Tuesday,—a day too late.

My master wrote to the eccentric gentleman, and explained how we stood, and asked for the extra time. It was freely granted; but in that case the payment must stand over till the end of the year, and this was just what we dreaded. My master looked terribly crest-fallen, and threw down his tools in disgust. For myself I knew not what to say or to do.

All at once, my master brightened up, and turned quickly round to me:—

“Harry, we need not give in. What day is it?”

“Friday,” I replied.

“Then there *are* two full days before us. We can finish in two days.”

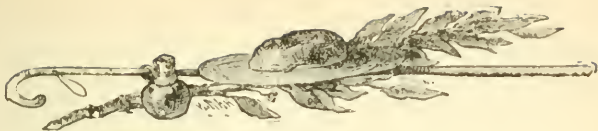
“There is but one day,” I replied. “The goods have to be packed on Monday morning. There is but to-morrow, Saturday.”

“And Sunday?”

He let out the word cautiously, and with some hesitation. Finding I did not speak, he repeated it boldly and with emphasis,—

“And Sunday—you forget Sunday. That will just turn the scale. We must, for once in our lives, work on the Sunday!”





CHAPTER XII.

I LOOKED AGAIN AT THE MOTTO.



SOME time before, when my principles were unsettled, the proposal would not have shocked me. I might have had a sting of conscience, but in the end I should have yielded. I should have argued that the case was one of necessity, and that the sin would not lie at our door. But I could not blind the light that was in me by any such device. I had left the shop and everything behind, and was standing in my room, looking full at the motto.

There it was, distinct and authoritative as ever. It admitted of no excuse or evasion. It bade me, under every circumstance, "Hold fast by my Sundays!"

For the moment, I had felt some uncertainty. My master's interests were at stake. All we had to hope for, came, in a great measure, from the prompt payment for the labour expended. If we did not receive it, the result would be disastrous. But the very

uncertainty ceased to exist, as I looked at the motto. Man might point out one way, but here was the voice of God bidding me to go in another. I could have no doubt which way to take. At any cost, come what might, I would "Hold fast by my Sundays."

A tap at the door disturbed me, and the anxious, harassed face of my master was thrust in. He had guessed why I had left the shop. It was to gain time, he thought, for reflection, and he said, hurriedly,—

"God requires us to show kindness to each other, Harry. I am sure you will not fail me just at the last."

"We must not delay a moment," I replied; "come, let us to work;" and I ran downstairs.

He followed just as quickly, and in a few seconds we were plying our respective tasks. He had hoped that my silence gave consent: that I was intending to yield. But this was far from being the case. I was only debating in my mind what I should do.

Would it be possible, by any means, to finish the work in time; that is, without trespassing on the Sunday?

There were certain cases, for I had turned the matter over in my mind, in which Sunday labour might be a necessity. Such cases had been put forward by our Saviour, that there might be no mistake. There were things to be done on the Sabbath-day in times of sickness and of peril; but our work did not come within the bounds of these exceptions. For if the matter had been fairly sifted, the need for prompt payment ought not to have been so pressing. Neglect of duty, long indulged in, had

led up to a certain crisis. It would not be consistent with the Divine command, in this instance, to work on the Sunday. But—and again I debated the point—how would it be possible to avoid any loss to my master?

I did not come to a conclusion till the close of the day. Then, as the men were about to leave, I made them a proposal:—The times were very desperate, and a little extra money would be acceptable. Would they stay over-hours?—nay, would they work with me through the night?

“You can go home,” I said, “and take a few hours rest, as I am about to do. But I shall be in the workshop again by ten. I mean to pull through by Saturday night.”

The men hesitated at first; but I found it would be a matter of pay. Happily, I had my savings to fall back upon, and I was resolved to carry my point. After a little further parley we came to an agreement, and then the men went home; and I made a hasty meal, and hurried to my attic to snatch the rest I needed.

I felt very peaceful and happy. There were no doubts or anxious questions of right or wrong to perplex my mind. I threw myself, dressed as I was, upon the bed, and was asleep in a moment. Three hours of hearty sleep took the tired feeling out of me. I woke up, just as I heard the men knocking at the door of the workshop.

I was quickly on the spot, but the door had been opened by Mrs. Wilkins. She turned on the gas, and made up the fire. I saw nothing of my master: he

was gone to bed. My mistress did not intend to go to rest. Long after, I saw the light in the window, and knew she was plying her machine; but at last the glimmer went out and all was darkness.

It was a cold starlight night, and very still. Not a sound was heard, except when the heavy tread of the policeman came down the street. Our workshop was warm and light, and we toiled on almost in silence. Now and then one of the men would hum a tune, and sometimes we spoke a word or two, as if to beguile our weariness; but, on the whole, we worked on in the utmost quietude.

At length a streak of daylight was seen in the east, and presently it made its way into the shop, and fell on our pale and rather haggard faces; for we were thoroughly tired and could scarcely handle our tools. Indeed one of the men began to grumble and to give signs of falling off. "It would have been better," he said, "to take Mr. Wilkins's advice, and work on the Sunday."

I found myself in rather a difficult position, and that I must again have recourse to increased pay. This soon did the business, and the men went home to breakfast and to rest. At nine o'clock, they promised to come back. As for myself, I lay down to sleep on a bench under the window.

That Saturday was the hardest pull of all. I shall never forget it as long as I live! I was getting tired out. My head and arms and feet ached. I was dizzy for want of sufficient sleep. And yet, as the day wore on, it was apparent that I should attain the end for which I had been striving—that there would

be no occasion to work on the Sunday. It would again be a case of sitting up late ; but this time my master did not leave us. He had caught the spirit of the race with time, for such it was, and he kept on bravely.

Ten—eleven o'clock struck, with a booming sound from the great church close by. Very little remained to be done ; and the set of handsome furniture was completed, and had a noble appearance. It pleased me more than any work I had ever undertaken. The men gave a hearty cheer when the last stroke was finished ; and as they did so, boom again went the clock—it was twelve.

The week had ended, and the Sabbath had begun !





CHAPTER XIII.



“A GOOD EXAMPLE IS WORTH
FOLLOWING.”

WE were glad enough to lay aside our tools and go into the house. We found my mistress sitting up for us, and a comfortable supper prepared. It was one of the pleasantest meals of which I had partaken since I had been under their roof. They expressed the utmost gratitude to me for the effort I had made; and my mistress cried for joy to think that some of their difficulties were over, and that the ruin she had feared might never come to pass.

Late as it was, we sat a little time talking together in a kind and friendly manner. And it seemed as if some new link were established between us—a link that almost reminded me of the days of my old master and Ruth.

I need not say that I slept well that night. Late as it was, I glanced at my motto ere I lay down to rest.

"It is you," I thought—speaking to it, as though it were a friend and counsellor—"it is you that have kept me out of danger, and have hedged me in on every side." And I went to sleep with the very motto on my lips, "Hold fast by your Sundays."

Next morning I was roused by the chiming of the early bells. It was later than usual; and I dressed in haste and went down, expecting that no breakfast would be prepared. This had been a matter of course on a Sunday morning; but a change had taken place. There was the table spread by the cheerful fire. All was neat and orderly in the room, and my master and mistress had already seated themselves to begin.

"Harry," said my master, in a more serious tone than he was wont to use, "I have been thinking that a good example is worth following. Somehow I feel glad to-day is not to be spent in the workshop. How if we set about, late as it is, my wife and I, and try to hold fast by our Sundays?"

"You could not do a better thing," I replied, joyfully; and then I found that both my master and mistress were intending to go to church.

Yes; it was almost like the old days. My mistress made haste to clear away and set all to rights; and then she put on her bonnet and cloak, and we went together: Mrs. Wilkins locking the door and carrying the key in her pocket, as Ruth had done.

We walked all three to church as we had never done before. Happy Sunday! It seems as fresh in my mind as though it were but yesterday! It was indeed a day of rest; the toils of the week had ceased. The workshop was empty and deserted.

The tools we had been handling so busily lay neglected. There was a higher matter on hand ; a business not of this world, but in which the utmost industry and care were needed ; a race to be run ; a prize to be gained ; and, to quicken our zeal, we had given us these Sabbaths, coming in regular succession, —like summer and winter, seedtime and harvest, and never failing ! What a blessing to be able to hold fast by these !

The next morning we might be said to have risen with the lark. The goods had to be packed and sent off by rail, and I was to go with them and see them delivered. I was, besides, to receive the payment, which, as my master said, was the pleasantest part of the story.

It was a cheerful morning in the Spring. The frost and snow had long since departed, and things were assuming a brighter aspect. At one of the stations where the train stopped, an old acquaintance of mine came hurrying up and got into the carriage. I recognised him at once as Peter Clarke.

He was much smarter than when I saw him last, and he wore a flower in his button-hole, as though he were going upon a holiday excursion. And so he was ; for he began to tell me that he was the most lucky person in the world, and was about to get married.

“A very smart girl she is,” he said, “and has a bit of money too ; so I am going to set up in business for myself in the best part of the town.”

I soon found that his disposition had not changed in the least. He was as boastful as ever, and talked

about the fine plate-glass window he had ordered for his shop, and the stock of goods that was to come down from London.

To listen to him you might fancy that his wife's fortune had no limit.

At the next station he left the train, and I had an opportunity of seeing the young woman he was intending to marry. She was on the platform with her sister, and was smart enough as regarded the gay colours of her dress, and the long ear-rings she wore, and the ribbons and the flowers.

I must confess she scarcely pleased me. There was a quiet staid girl in my own village, whom I had known from a boy,—a girl whose plain dress and neat bonnet would have formed a contrast to the finery of the other: but whenever the thought had occurred to me of a settled home and fireside of my own, it was linked with the remembrance of Susan Dale; and this little conversation with Peter Clarke made me resolve, at my next visit home, to lay before her the state of my mind. The bad times were getting over, and I might with my savings begin life on my own account: not in a grand new shop, but in a humble plodding way, and by degrees getting up the hill.

It had always been sweet to me to think of a time like this. I was little given to building castles in the air, but as the train whirled along I did paint a little picture in my own fancy of what might, one day, be!





CHAPTER XIV.

MORE CHANGES STILL.



WHEN I reached the end of my journey, I did just as Mr. Wilkins had directed me. When the van of furniture was unloosed from the train, I waited by it till horses were brought, and it was slowly dragged to the gates of the house where the eccentric gentleman lived. Some old servants, who looked as if they had lived in the family for years, came out to receive the goods; and I was asked into a kind of ante-room to wait until the master of the house could speak to me. I had waited perhaps three-quarters of an hour, when he came in. He explained the delay by telling me that he had been superintending the unpacking of the furniture, and that he was satisfied with the way in which his orders had been executed. He was quite ready with his payment, and I received a cheque for the full amount which we had expected.

"It was a great convenience to me to have the

furniture in time," he said ; "and you will have lost nothing by your civility. I have a large circle of friends, and I shall recommend some of them to pay your shop a visit."

I was glad enough of the promise. Indeed, I never felt more light-hearted in my life than I did on my return home. I was carrying back a plentiful return for our labour, and a hope for the future. And better than all, there would be no broken Sabbaths to rise in judgment against us.

When I returned home, I found my master diligently engaged in looking over his books. It was time, he said, to take to the business in earnest, and he intended for the future to do so. "And now let us see what you have brought," he continued as he closed his book.

Glad enough he was when I put the amount into his hand. It would set us quite straight, he said ; and when the tide had fairly turned, he should have a proposal to make to me.

The tide was not long in turning. Trade began to revive, and orders to come in,—many of them from entire strangers ; so that we greatly extended our connection. Then, what was better still, my master turned over a new leaf, and became as diligent as before he had been careless. He worked hard, and gave up those continual pleasure jaunts which had taken up so much of his time and thought. His wife continued her dressmaking and added to the income : so that we began to be quite prosperous.

Still, amid all this, the thought was often in my mind that I should like to rise a step higher in the

world. There was but one difficulty. I was unwilling to leave the old business, and I had scarcely saved enough to make any great venture. And although I felt sure that Susan returned my attachment, I dare not openly speak to her on the subject until I could offer her a home equal in comfort to her own. These thoughts perplexed me, and I used to turn them over and over in my mind. All at once, however, the way was made plain before me.

One day,—it was my twenty-fifth birthday,—my master asked if I remembered his saying that when the tide turned he should make me a proposal.

"Things are now in a very different state," he continued; "trade is brisk, and the business what it has never been before. I date all my success from that Sunday!"

We were both silent a few minutes; then he went on,—

"I feel as if you ought to fill a better place than that of foreman. The business will maintain us both in tolerable comfort. What say you to becoming a partner?"

My heart seemed to leap into my mouth. No proposal could have been more welcome,—all my difficulties would be solved.

"I tell you what, Harry," resumed Mr. Wilkins; "my wife and myself have been discussing the matter a good while. We owe you a great deal, more perhaps than we can ever repay."

"Don't talk of that," I interrupted him by saying.

"But I *will* talk. That Sunday business seems

to have made all right with me. I have been like another man since I went regularly to church, and gave up pleasuring. It is wonderful the effect of keeping Sunday upon us working men. I could write a book about it if I were a scholar. My head is clear and cool on the Monday morning, and I feel rested and ready for the week. There is something else, I know, behind all this, but I have not felt my way to it yet."

"*There is more in the Sunday than you think!*" The words spoken long ago by my mother, recurred forcibly to my mind. There was indeed more than I thought! Rest—peace—joy; the hidden manna, of which if a man eat, he shall never hunger; and the water of life, of which if he drink, he shall never thirst! What does the Sabbath-breaker gain, I thought; or rather, what does he *lose*, by his snatches of unholy pleasure, boasted of from time to time? Fatigue, dissatisfaction, loss of bodily vigour, and the harvest reaped by the hand of the diligent. And worse than all, loss of that better Sabbath whose rest will be complete and eternal!

My master's proposal was now again made to me, and we held a good deal of conversation on the subject. I need not say that his offer was thankfully accepted, and it fitted in with the scheme I had been lately planning. I was about to pay a visit to my parents, and that would be the time for speaking the important words which had been considered again and again. That would be the time to ask Susan if she was content to share my humble lot and be my wife.

The arrangements connected with my change of position were all pleasant and easy. At first Mr. Wilkins proposed that I should continue to live under his roof; but when I shook my head, he smiled as though he guessed my secret.

"Ah! you are like the rest of the world," he said; "I suppose you are thinking of setting up house-keeping for yourself?"

When I confessed that such was the fact, both he and his wife entered into the matter with all their hearts. The close and confined situation of the house did not suit my master's health; and, as matters stood, he was glad of the opportunity of leaving it. Within the last few weeks a small legacy had come to Mrs. Wilkins; and this, with the improved state of the business, gave them the right to choose another place of residence. They were not attached to the old place as I was; and it was proposed that I should live at the shop, and that they should remove to a short distance where the street was wider and more airy. I was not afraid of the step, as far as Mr. Wilkins was concerned. I felt convinced that the old days of sloth and inattention would not return. And the old-fashioned house in which Andrew Gibson had passed so much of his life was amply sufficient for me. It was early in the day to think of a better situation. Years after, that might be!

But, before any final arrangements were made, I must hear from Susan's own lips if she was willing to come. It would never do to put off the important question any longer! To-morrow was Saturday; I

would have my little holiday trip, and return in time for business on the Monday.

This time I did not choose the old mode of conveyance—the carrier's cart. I went by train to within a few miles of my native village, and then I walked through the cool of the summer evening. My heart beat a little at the sight of the well-known spire rising up from among the trees; for this was the most important visit I had ever paid. But I quickened my pace, and was quickly at home. There was the neat trim garden in which my father was working; and I caught sight of my mother's spotless cap as she stood at the window. Within the cottage all was in order for the Sabbath. The room was clean, and not a thing out of place. The Sunday shoes stood in their place, ready blacked; the clean clothes were airing by the fire; the Sunday coat brushed and laid ready. Nothing remained to be done but the preparation for the evening meal, and the solemn prayer and reading of the Word of God.

I had been used to these pious, well-ordered customs, from my childhood upwards. They were always dear to me. Happy the cottage home where they prevail; where homely virtues reign; and above them, the fear of God rules supreme, and reaches to the very thoughts and intents of the heart.





CHAPTER XV.



A SUNNY SPOT IN MY LIFE.

HEN my father saw me, he threw down his spade, and came towards me ; and I soon felt my mother's arms round my neck. But much as I enjoyed that happy meeting and the pleasant chat at the cottage door, I was not quite at my ease. The gist and purport of my journey home did not altogether lie here. I knew I could not sleep until I had spoken to Susan.

I think my mother suspected my state of mind, for she gave a knowing look at my father when I said presently that I should stroll a little farther. Somehow I felt very shy and bashful about mentioning names, and did not like to say openly that I was going to call upon Susan.

I knew exactly in what state I should find Susan's home : that, on rather a better scale, it would be a counterpart of my own. When I saw it, my heart

beat faster still. There it was, the snow-white curtains shading the windows, the carpet on the floor, the trim bookcase—for Susan was considered quite a scholar—the geraniums and mignonette on the window-seat; and, better than all, Susan herself sitting at work in the doorway. I must pause a moment to describe her, the faithful companion of my life, the helpmeet through many years, the dear and loved one, who, I trust, awaits me beyond the grave!

I see her now, as she was that evening, in her quiet-looking dress, without the least pretence to ornament or finery; her smooth brown hair neatly braided; her kind and sensible face, and friendly eyes. I thought her, at the time, and I well know her now, to have been all that a woman professing godliness should be: clothed, not with the outward adorning of gold and silver, but with that “meek and quiet spirit” which is beyond all price.

I was glad when she told me she was alone. Her father and mother had gone to market at the nearest town, and would not be home at present. This would be a golden opportunity for telling her what was in my mind, and I did not intend to let it slip.

She seemed very pleased to see me; indeed her manner had always been cordial and pleasant. She gave me a chair and sat down again to her sewing.

Every little incident connected with that evening is imprinted on my memory. I recollect that men were carrying hay in the field opposite, working late to secure it against the weather. The scent of hay was wafted to us as we sat. And I remember the distant hum of the village street, and the clear note

of the thrush as it sang in the tree opposite ; and I recollect the ticking of the clock, and the nervous sensation in my throat when I tried to speak.

At length I blundered out the purport of my visit, and the question that had been on my lips so long. I had been attached to her, I said, for years ; and then came the old story, repeated again and again, in all classes and conditions of life, but which never loses any of its interest.

And then Susan's busy fingers stopped, and her work was dropped on the floor ; and by-and-by she was soberly picking it up, her eyes moist, and a bright colour in her cheeks, and she and I were engaged to be married.

There are some sunny spots in life which shine out through the past, and never lose their lustre. This visit home was one. I stayed with Susan until her parents returned, and then came the business of asking their consent. This was quickly over, and I stepped briskly back to my own cottage, my heart light as a feather. Then came the evening meal, and the short solemn prayer, ere we retired to rest.

The Sabbath morning broke with the chiming of the bells. There was the cheerful breakfast, the welcome hour of worship, and the quiet walk in the summer's afternoon. Susan and I wandered by the brook, and over the meadows, and up by the green copse, all in its leafy beauty. And better still, there was the pleasant converse, and the happy thoughts of the future, and the consciousness that we who had so lately pledged our troth to each other were of one heart and one mind, having the same hopes and aims

and purposes as regards this world and that which is to come.

It was a Sunday long to be remembered in my simple history, but it passed away as such days must. The last note of psalm or hymn died out, and the village was hushed in repose. For a long time I did not sleep, my heart was too full of joy and thankfulness; for the hopes of early years are bright, and there seemed scarce a cloud upon my sky.

When I did sleep it was to dream of a home with Susan!

The next morning I did not go straight back to my business. When I had talked the matter over again with my father and mother, and heard them approve of my choice, and tell me they had suspected it all along, and that Susan had declined many offers of marriage—"no doubt," as my mother observed, "for my sake," and when I had said farewell to Susan herself, I took a little trip farther to call on my old master and Ruth. It was a long time since I had seen them, and I wanted to tell the important news, and invite them to the wedding. The wedding would take place before the summer was over; for there was nothing to wait for, and the sooner Susan was mistress of the house the better.

Andrew Gibson had a pleasant place in the country. There was a field, and a cow grazing in it, and there was a large garden stocked with fruit and vegetables. Ruth kept the house, as she used to do, only she had servants to look after, and wore a silk gown on high days and holidays. But she was the same dear good gentle Ruth as ever.

They were very glad to see me, and soon we sat talking just as we used to do; and then Ruth showed me her poultry-yard and her dairy, and the stack just got in from the meadows, and all the treasures they possessed.

I felt just as bashful as ever when I began to tell the purport of my visit and to talk about Susan. But I contrived to get it out at last, and Mr. Gibson and Ruth seemed delighted to hear of my prospect, and wished me all kinds of happiness.

"I am glad you are going to stick to the old business, Harry," said Andrew Gibson. "I feel it will be safe in your hands; and Ruth and I will be sure and come to your wedding."

By-and-by my dear old master took me aside to talk about his son.

"Harry," he said, "something always tells me that my poor boy will come back some day. I may not be alive, but it comforts me to think you will be in the old place. He'll be sure to find his way there, for he knows nothing of our removal; will you promise for my sake to be kind to him?"

"You may rest assured of it," I said hastily; and I fully intended what I said.

"It comforts me to hear you say so," and the old man wiped his eyes. "I know, at least I fear, that he will come ragged and beggared and an outcast, like the prodigal son. I leave him to you, Harry, to give him succour for the sake of the old friendship that has been between us."

Again I promised. I had thought often of that outcast son, about whom many particulars had been

told me ; and it had run strangely in my mind that he might some day return. But the subject was dropped for the present, or rather it gave place to happier topics ; and soon after I took my leave.

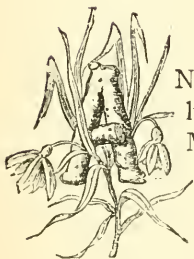
The next time my kind friends and I were to meet would be at my wedding.





CHAPTER XVI.

THE TWO WEDDINGS.



ND now came an exciting period,—happy, but not settled by any means. Mr. and Mrs. Wilkins in due time vacated the house, and settled themselves in another, at a very little distance, and I was put in possession.

Proud enough I was to have a house of my own ; nor did I feel the least envy on passing the fine shop in the Market Place about to be occupied by Peter Clarke. His house was large and grand compared to mine ; and the windows were wide open, for it was being done up from top to bottom, and flashy-looking papers being hung, and a great deal of painting and whitewashing going on. I was quite contented with my humbler abode. I had it well cleansed and put in excellent order. I chose neat-looking papers, such as I knew Susan would like, and furnished the house

plainly, but as well as I could. To tell the truth, I made sundry little articles in over-hours to give a better effect; and I took care to have a new illumination hung up over the sitting-room fireplace, by way of ornament, and to keep us always in remembrance of my favourite motto,—

“HOLD FAST BY YOUR SUNDAYS.”

Time passed quickly on; days and weeks glided by; and at length every arrangement was made, and I started off one fine morning to fetch Susan. We were to be married at the village church, and the wedding was to be a very quiet one.

On the way, however, I had a glimpse of a much grander affair than mine. At the station where Peter Clarke had on my previous journey left the train, a carriage with white horses and postilions were standing, and the village bells were ringing merrily. I had a passing glance at the wedding party, at the bride in silks and furbelows, and with a white veil and white satin shoes, and as dashing as you please. Peter himself, too, I saw, very smart and important in his white waistcoat and gloves, and the bouquet in his button-hole. The glance was a very momentary one, and on we rushed, leaving all behind.

That gay bridal party dwelt in my mind for some time. It stands out now in vivid contrast with other scenes to be recounted in the life of Peter Clarke. But my own wedding! That most important epoch in my history. Bright and fair it rises before me: the pleasant morning in the early autumn, with a crisp coolness in the air, and the dew scarce dried

from the grass, and the cottage home done up in its best array, with new white curtains in the window and flowers on the table ; and my dear old master in his Sunday suit, and Ruth in white ribbons and a grey dress made in honour of the occasion ; and my father quietly happy and content, and my mother brisk as ever ; and then the bride, modest and unpretending, and just what a working-man's bride should be.

Happy group ! I see it now, through all this lapse of years ; and I date from that marriage-day the best and sweetest happiness that can be known on earth !

We walked to church attended by many friends whose smiling faces seemed to make sunshine around us ; and the church was crowded to see Susan Dale married.

I think we both entered fully into the service. I think our hearts united in solemn prayer as we knelt together,—prayer that God would be with us through the untried scenes of our future lot, and that the pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night might go before us. And as a gleam of sunshine streamed through the window and fell lovingly upon us, we felt as though it were reflected in our hearts, and we rose up glad and hopeful.

What a day of quiet happiness it was for all of us ! There was no boisterous mirth or revelry, but merely a gathering of those friends we loved and valued. When breakfast was over, Susan and I started for a few days' holiday ; and when these had sped quickly by, I brought her home.

That bringing Susan home was the best of all. I had been afraid the place would look dark and gloomy after her country life, and that she would miss' the green fields and the pleasant sights and sounds to which she had been accustomed. But she never hinted at anything of the kind. She was pleased with the house, and the furniture, and the rooms, and all belonging to them. In fact, she was as brisk and cheerful as a lark; and a more frugal, prudent wife could not have been. My home-life was indeed a happy one,—order and good management reigned, and my affairs might well prosper.

All day we were busy with our several duties, but the evening was our own. The evenings began to close in early now, and I was glad enough when the time came to shut up the shop and go to my cheerful hearth. The lamp would be lighted and the curtains drawn, and beyond our fireside comfort we seemed to want for nothing. I used sometimes to read to Susan while she was busy with her sewing, for she had a little library of her own which she had brought with her. Sometimes the book was religious, and sometimes it contained information about many things, and served to improve the mind and raise it above the little cares of everyday life. So content was I with these evenings, that I envied no one, however rich or great; nor did I wish for any other amusement or recreation than what they afforded.

Such was not exactly the case with my old acquaintance, Peter Clarke. When we had been home a few weeks, he and his bride called upon us.

She was a fine-looking girl, but very showily

dressed, and had a way of talking and laughing loudly that was a contrast to my quiet Susan. Nor were her notions at all in harmony with those of Susan. She meant to enjoy herself, she said, now she was married, and to make Peter take her to places of amusement. She had no idea of a hum-drum life. She wondered how my wife contrived to exist in such a dull situation. I must say I felt rather sorry for Peter. He was thrown into the shade by his wife, who talked incessantly and boasted even more than he did. I found they kept two servants, and were living quite in style for such kind of people ; and I wondered how much money she had brought him.

"It is a capital place for business, where we live," she said to Susan. "I wonder you don't persuade your husband to break up here, and take a shop in the Market Place. Peter will have enough to retire upon in a few years."

I did not clearly understand how that could be, for I perceived that Peter's goods were ticketed at low prices, and I knew that rents and payments in that part of the town were very high. And I knew also, for Peter confessed as much, that he was constantly making holiday ; and I wondered how long this state of things would last.

They were both anxious that we should return the call, and I could not well refuse. Susan shrank from the acquaintance, but I felt sure the intercourse would be a very casual one ; and as for visiting, I set my face steadily against it. We were working people, I said, and had no leisure

But we did call upon them one holiday afternoon. We found the house full of cheap showy furniture ; but very disorderly, and without the least comfort in it. Mrs. Clarke was dressed up like a lady, and talked as fast and as loud as ever. But Peter, I thought, looked rather careworn and harassed. "Business," he said, for we began to talk on the subject, "was a hazardous game to play at ;" and he added that a new shop had been opened which was likely to injure him.

He said this privately to me, while his wife was talking to Susan. I did not think he was very happy. They were scarcely ever at home in the evening, and I fancied his wife was a bit of a termagant. I felt sure that Susan thought so too, only she held her peace.

After this visit we saw very little of the Clarks for more than a year. But one day, as I was walking down the street, I caught sight of Peter on the opposite side. He crossed over at once to shake hands.

"I am afraid you are going to drop us," he said ; "and I shall be very sorry for that."

Then he told me how he wished my wife would use a little influence with his wife.

"The truth is," he said, "we are living too fast. I want to hold her in, but she won't hear a word of that."

"She thinks, perhaps, she has a right to do as she likes," I replied, hardly knowing what to say.

"That is just it. She brought me some money, but it was all swallowed up in furnishing. I have nothing but the business to depend upon."

"But if the business is a flourishing one——" I began.

"I hoped it would have been," he interrupted me by saying; "but I have been taken in. I am selling almost at prime cost, and that sounds like beggary; don't it?"

"If you laid the matter before Mrs. Clarke——" I began again.

"That is of no use. She won't believe me. Women know nothing of business, and seem to think that their husbands are made of money."

Susan did not think so, but I forbore to make any comparison; only I called to mind a text of Scripture that said, "A good wife is of the Lord."

I was sorry to see Peter so sad and crestfallen. He walked with me down the street, and came into our neat little room. The tea was on the table, and he took a cup with us.

After tea, Susan brought out her work, and the lamp was lighted as usual, and the fire made up and the curtains drawn. When he took his leave he gave me to understand that I had by far the best of it.





CHAPTER XVII.

“WHAT HAS THE SABBATH-BREAKER
GAINED?”



FTER a time my cosy parlour lost for a while its brightest ornament.

Susan was upstairs, and a little daughter lay by her side — a treasure, it seemed to me, beyond all price. How I kissed the soft velvet cheek, and played with the tiny hand! How I hung over the innocent babe with all a father's rapture! Susan and I thought that now our cup of bliss was full.

Just at this epoch, and while I was having solitary meals, Peter Clarke came more frequently than ever. I wondered that his wife would permit his absence; but he talked very little about her. I knew the state his home had slipped into. I knew that the smart cheap furniture was dirty and shabby already, that

all was disorder and waste, and that his wife's temper was driving him from his own fireside. I never begrudged him a place at my hearth.

One of our conversations I must try and record. I remember the night well. It was Saturday, and the next day Susan was to come down stairs. Thanks to the handy little servant my wife had trained, my situation had not been very forlorn. My room had been kept neat, and the meals served with comfort. But still there had been an absence of those niceties, if I might call them so, which marked the presence of the mistress. I had, besides, never thoroughly enjoyed the meal when I sat down to it alone. There had lacked the friendly converse and the pleasant smile which made so much of my daily happiness ; and though my leisure time was passed with Susan in her room upstairs, there was a sense of loneliness when I came down again. I was thinking this as I poured out my cup of tea, when a figure went by the window and a tap came at the door.

I went to open it, for I knew that my old acquaintance had dropped in for a call.

He came in silently, and I was struck with the change in his appearance since his last visit. He looked worn and haggard, and sat down with an air of dejection. I asked him to take a cup of tea ; but he refused, and remained for a little time silent, without speaking a word. All at once he cast his eye upon the motto over the fireplace.

"Ah !" he said, mournfully. "It might have been better for me if I had done the same ! Do you know, Harry" (he always called me so), "I date all my

troubles and vexations from that wretched Sunday spent on the river !"

I was glad enough to hear him confess the evil of Sunday excursions, but I said nothing.

"All is not gold that glitters," he went on, "and somehow everything has gone wrong with me since."

"In what way?" I asked.

"In all ways. One thing I am certain of," he continued, still looking at the motto: "those who promote Sunday pleasuring are no friends to the working-man. I have scarce spent a quiet Sunday for years; and it takes till the middle of the week to get over the fatigue."

"Yet God gave the seventh day for a day of rest," I remarked.

"I know; but pleasure is not rest. I have found it out, Harry. It is grievous toil. Your partner Mr. Wilkins, see what his Sundays have done for him! Ever since he took to keeping Sunday everything has gone well with him."

"Because," I said, "his head is clear, his mind refreshed, his body rested. Monday morning finds him right and ready for work, not wearied and jaded and wanting the rest he has omitted to take."

"I think you are right, Harry; indeed, I know you are, now it is too late."

"Why too late, Peter? Besides, we are only speaking of Sunday as regards the bodily rest it yields; there is more behind, far more. Indeed, the very gist and meaning of the Day points to things unseen, and by many unrealized."

"It is too late!" he said, not noticing my speech.

"We have been going, step by step, in a downhill course. I can't retrieve it. I wish I could. I have come to you to-night, because you are the only friend I have in the world."

I dreaded what he was going to say. There had been rumours afloat for some time respecting him, and now my fears were realized.

"The fact is, Harry," he went on to tell me, "I am close upon being a ruined man."

"That is very serious," I replied, hardly knowing what to say.

"And you are my only resource. I was deceived about the money my wife was to bring me. It was not nearly so much as I expected."

"But your business," I said; "your business?"

"It was a moderate one. I don't say but it might have been better, had I paid more attention to it; but it gets less and less. People complain of the goods, and my shopmen are not in my interest. A great many customers have gone away, and I cannot get them back."

"All this is sad," I replied, "but it can be remedied if you put your shoulder to the wheel and get the business together again. Nothing can stand before industry and steady perseverance."

"Ah!" he said again; "but it is too late, unless—" and he paused.

I made no remark, waiting till he should finish the sentence.

At last he told me that his stock of goods had been all on credit, and so had some of his household furniture. And his creditors threatened him with

an execution in the house ; indeed, unless some one gave security for him, all would be over in a few days.

I confess I was rather staggered to hear this revelation, and I could guess what would come next. He would ask me to give security for him ; and this was what I was resolved never to do.

His wife, he said, knew nothing of what was coming. He had tried to alarm her by hints and warnings, but she would not take them. She only called him a stingy fellow, and said that when a girl married she expected never to want for money.

I told him he was wrong to conceal anything. He ought to be open as the day, and explain the exact state of affairs. "It will be much worse for your wife," I said, "if the misfortune comes without notice."

"It cannot come if you befriend me," he replied quickly ; "indeed, you are the only person I can ask. If you will give security for me, the danger may be warded off, and I will work night and day to right myself. You shall never repent having helped a poor fellow in his extremity."

I shook my head, but he was not deterred from asking me again and again. And he pleaded so earnestly that it made my heart ache.

"Just go upstairs," he said, "and consult your wife. Women are very tender-hearted, and she will be sorry for me. I will take no refusal till you have talked it over with her."

I knew Susan would think as I did, but I went upstairs to pacify him. Susan was sitting by the

fire, and singing in a low voice to her infant as she lulled it to sleep.

"Harry," she said, "come and look at our treasure; she gets dearer to me every day."

I stooped to kiss the dimpled face, and for a moment forgot my errand. But this would not do, and I told her what had happened. I was very sorry for Peter. I had half-relented as I went upstairs. But Susan had a stock of prudence to eke out with when mine was gone.

"On no account, Harry," she said firmly; "we must do nothing of the kind: we have another to care for besides ourselves."

"I know, I know. I will send the poor fellow away," I replied, turning from her.

"Stay, Harry, we may be kind if we must be just. We will do all we can for Peter and his wife. If they are turned out of house and home we can give them shelter."

"But you don't like Mrs. Clarke," I said hastily, and looking back into the room.

"We must not think of likes and dislikes now," she replied gently, "but of what we can do for them."

I stepped back and kissed her. I knew the goodness of her heart, and what a treasure I possessed in Susan. But I was grieved for my old acquaintance, and scarce knew what to say to him.

He looked up eagerly as I came in, to see what news I was bringing. I think my face told the tale, for he got up hastily and took his hat.

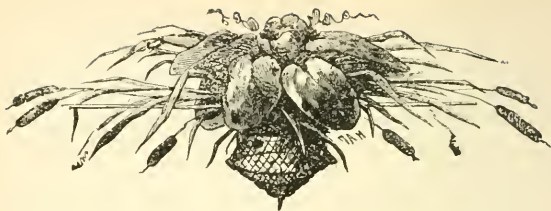
"All is over with me," he exclaimed.

I repeated what Susan had said, but he did not

pay much attention. He pulled his hat over his eyes and went away.

I was sorry to my heart, and was half-inclined to fetch him back. But Susan's opinion had weight with me, and I forbore. A few days after, I had occasion to pass the shop in the Market Place, and found it closed. This part of Peter's career had come to an end. He was a bankrupt.





CHAPTER XVIII.

THE WATCHWORD OF MY FAMILY.



THE next day Susan was about again, as usual, and the home-life went on with its accustomed order and regularity.

Indeed, month after month and year after year slipped away with the utmost rapidity. I saw no more at this juncture of Peter Clarke, and I heard that he had left the town.

At the time of the failure, my wife went to the house to offer all the assistance in her power, and to invite Mrs. Clarke to stay with us till affairs should be settled. But the foolish woman refused every overture. She was rude and angry, and said "the misfortune was her husband's fault. She had brought him money, and had a right to enjoy it. It was the worst day's work she ever did, to marry him." And much of this was said before Peter's face.

My wife came away shocked and distressed, and leaving the miserable couple squabbling in the half-empty forlorn room they called the drawing-room, and which had not a particle of comfort about it.

After that, I went myself; but Peter came to the door and told me he could not ask me in. They were going away, and would be able to pay half a crown in the pound. Even then, a spark of his old boastfulness was in him, for he talked of his wife's rich relations, and said he should get them to advance money, and set up in business somewhere else. Whether they did or not I often wondered, but Peter and his wife were now lost to us.

As years rolled on, I became a thriving, prosperous man. There is an old adage, that a man is to ask his wife how he is to live. The question in my case was fully answered. Susan's thrift and industry helped me forward in every way. I had long ago returned to the old style of furniture, and was treading in Andrew Gibson's steps. Our house of business had a good name both in the town and country. I feel a glow of pride when I think of it—honest pride, I hope, for the success was fairly earned.

Mr. and Mrs. Wilkins continued our best friends. But Mr. Wilkins, after a time, became more of a sleeping partner than an active one. His health was not good, and he began to talk of retiring. It seemed probable that in the end the business would be entirely my own.

My father and mother were still living; but the toils of labour had ceased, for they had saved enough on which to live in their old age, and were now

reaping the fruits of a life of industry and perseverance. For the harvest of good is as surely gathered in as the harvest of evil.

Andrew Gibson had reached a great age, and was tottering on the brink of the grave. But the more nearly he approached his final rest, the more anxious he became about the fate of his son. Whenever I saw him, this was the theme upon which he dwelt.

Many changes had been brought about by circumstances. The old place was too small for the business that was now doing, and it was injustice to myself to reside there any longer. By this time, also, the house was strait and narrow. I had six children: and more accommodation was required for our health and comfort. It was proposed to remove to one of the handsome shops in the Market Place, where the business would in all probability be doubled.

This scheme was well digested before it was put into practice; and it never would have been thought of had I not by this time been possessed of capital—that bulwark of prosperity.

But Andrew Gibson shook his head. He had nothing to say against the prudence of the step, or its expediency; but the idea was still uppermost in his mind that his boy, as he called him, would one day return. “He will come to the old place as sure as can be, and find none but strangers,” was his cry. This difficulty, however, was met. When all came to be finally settled, it was thought wise to retain the old premises as a kind of warehouse, in which to store the goods. Our foreman, who filled the place I vacated on becoming partner, was to reside there;

and I proposed that the words "Late Gibson" should not be erased from the position they had so long occupied over the door of the shop. This arrangement pacified my dear old master. He should die, he said, in peace, if he thought that one kind hand would be stretched out to the wanderer.

Every time I saw Andrew Gibson I feared it would be the last. On sunshiny days he would sit by the door enjoying the fresh air, for he was cheerful and contented as ever. He could no longer read in the old Bible, for his sight was almost gone; but Ruth spent much of her time in reading to him, and ministered in every way to his comfort. It was a peaceful ending to a good and pious life.

"I am not without resource, Harry," he would say, when I paid him a visit, as I often did. "I am very happy. This seems to me the land of Beulah, to which the pilgrims came before they went over the river." And then he would speak of the presence of his Saviour with him day after day, and the light and joy and peace shed abroad in his heart.

I used to return from these visits more than ever built up in a faith which can thus sanctify the whole life, and cause it to end in peace and the sure hope of coming glory.

"This is what religion does," I used to think; "and nothing can stand in its place, or stretch to its boundless limits. Every other resource or stimulus fails, save only this, which is not of man, but of God."

My own career had been a striking instance that "Godliness" has the promise of this life and of that

which is to come. The opposite might have been the case—the counterpart of Peter Clarke's sad experience. I trust I was truly thankful, and remembered Who had made me to differ. Not of myself could I have climbed these bright steps. No resolutions of my own could have withstood the solicitations of the world and of the tempter. It was the Divine Hand stretched towards me from above, the power given me by the Holy Spirit, which had won for me the victory. Not unto myself but unto God be all the praise.

The various changes at which I have hinted as likely to happen, took place in due course of time. Mr. Wilkins retired altogether from the business, and the whole concern was in my hands. A new shop was also taken and carefully stocked. The house adjoining it seemed large and handsome to our moderate notions; but we brought thither the old furniture, making the change as little expensive as we could. It was an airy house, and had a strip of garden behind, and the windows at the back looked over the river. Susan was delighted with her new home, and we settled into it with the greatest comfort.

I soon found that the step I had taken was a success, for the business received an impulse, and I sold off my stock more quickly than I expected. My new position raised me up in the social scale, and I took my place in the town as a substantial and thriving tradesman.

I must not forget to mention that I took care to fix over the fireplace in the sitting-room, so that all

who came in might see it, a newly illuminated copy of the motto—the watchword, I called it, of my family,—

“HOLD FAST BY YOUR SUNDAYS.”





CHAPTER XIX.

THE WANDERER'S RETURN.



My life was now a very busy one. I had a family to bring up, an extensive concern to manage, and public offices to fill in the town where I lived. At this juncture, great watchfulness and care were needed, lest anxiety about worldly matters should choke and hinder the growth of the good seed within ; lest, in passing through things temporal, I should lose the things which were eternal.

And now, I perceived more and more the value of the Day of Rest. The greatest check to a careless frame of mind was found here. During the sacred hours which intervened between the close of the six days of labour and their beginning again I could pause and reflect. I could obtain, by secret prayer and by public devotion, the strength I needed. Here the Christian armour could be brightened, the weary soul refreshed, and the things which are unseen realized.

Happy Sundays! I repeat the expression,—Happy Sundays! Bright seasons scattered, like jewels, along my path! Wells of water in the desert, springing up into everlasting life! Ever, with God's help, would I hold fast by these!

At this period, busy as it was, I used often to ponder over the fate of Andrew Gibson's son; for the subject was in some sort forced upon me by my old master himself. The nearer he approached his end the more anxious he became to hear some tidings. He made many inquiries, and even inserted advertisements in the newspapers, which he hoped might lead to a discovery. But at present all was in vain. Not a scrap of information had been obtained from any quarter. He still clung to the idea that if his son returned he would find his way to the old place of business. The eager questioning look he used to give me when I went to see him was very touching. I would have given much to be able to say, "Yes; he has come at last;" but no such thing had occurred, and I could not utter a word.

As time passed on, I began to give up all hope. "He is dead," I thought, "or if not, he refuses his father's overtures, and will never return."

Still I was always, to a certain extent, upon the watch. If any forlorn-looking person stopped to look at the old place, and I was there, I noted the circumstance narrowly. I regarded the words, "Late Gibson," as a kind of beacon, and would not have removed them on any account whatever; but as far as the wanderer was concerned, they seemed to remain there in vain.

One Saturday evening,—I well remember it,—it was midwinter, and flakes of snow were beginning to fall,—I had closed my shop, and was enjoying that domestic peace and quietude which had ever been my delight and, I might add, my safeguard. We were all gathered round the cheerful fire. My elder children were reading or working, and the little ones were on my knee. Susan, the careful mother and loving wife, was plying her needle, looking up from time to time on the happy group with a contented smile.

The doors were closed, as it seemed, against the outer world. But it was not so to be; the world had not quite done with us. I was summoned out of the room to speak to one of my workmen.

“Sir,” he said, “I thought it right to name it, as you have charged us so often: there has been a shabby-looking person——”

“Well?” I said quickly, for the thought of my old master’s son rushed to my mind.

“He has hung about the place all day,” continued the man, “going and coming. I tried to speak to him once, but he moved away as quick as could be,—but not so quick but that I saw him looking at the words, *Late Gibson*, as if he wanted——”

“Is he there now?” I asked hurriedly.

“Happen he may be. He don’t seem as if he could find it in his heart to go.”

I put on my great-coat and hat, and stepped hastily back to the sitting-room. Brightly blazed the fire, and the home circle looked more cheerful than ever. But I did not hesitate. If I could only be the means of bringing back the outcast to his home, I cared

nothing for the snow and sleet outside. Susan looked up at me inquiringly.

"Are you going out?" she said. "What is the matter?"

"I shall be back very soon," I replied, raising the little one in my arms, and kissing it; and then in a few words I told her what had happened.

The tears were in her eyes. "Oh, go," she said earnestly; "by all means go!"

Susan was not a woman to hold back her husband from doing his duty. There was none of the spirit of weak indulgence about her.

In a few minutes I was walking down the street, so fast that my companion could scarcely keep up with me. "It may after all be a mistake and a disappointment," I thought; "but no matter. I will not let the slightest chance slip through my fingers, if only for the sake of my dear old master."

We were soon at the old shop. I walked up and down the street, but could see no one. Indeed, it was so bleak a night that scarcely a dog would care to be abroad. I went into the kitchen and stood by the fire. We agreed to watch, one at the back and the other at the front of the house. There was a great uncertainty as to whether the stranger would come any more that night; but we would give him the chance. "If not," I thought, "I will watch all day to-morrow."

The snowstorm had a little abated by this time, and as the clouds rolled away, the moon struggled out and threw a feeble ray upon the pavement. I was still standing by the fire, which had been heaped

up with fuel, when I heard a sound outside the window. Then, close to the glass, I saw a face peering anxiously and timidly in. It was a worn, haggard face, quite unknown to me, but I felt sure by a kind of instinct that it was the face of the poor outcast, Andrew Gibson's son.

I was on my guard. I stole noiselessly from the house, keeping in the shadow, so that he might not see me. And in a few seconds I was close beside him,—nay, I had hold of his arm.

"My friend," I said quickly, "who is it that you want?"

He seemed alarmed, and would have slunk away, but that I kept my hold.

"There is no one here," he said at length; "the people are all dead and gone that I came in search of."

"Do you mean Andrew Gibson?" I asked; "and Ruth?"

I felt his arm tremble. He looked at me with an eagerness I shall never forget, but did not speak.

"Come in," I said, "to the fire. It is too cold standing here outside. I will answer any question you like to ask. I have the business now, and am the master."

He followed me into the house and sat down by the hearth. He looked thin and ill, and as though he had met with rough usage in the world; but I felt more than ever convinced he was the man I wanted.

He would not yield me his confidence as I had hoped. I told him that Andrew Gibson was living

some few miles off, and that Ruth still kept house for him. I spoke as though he knew them as a matter of course; and in spite of his silence and reserve the expression of his face was not to be mistaken. Indeed, the tears began to trickle down his face. I was resolved not to let him go. In a moment of fear or shame he might set off and no trace of him be discovered any more.

It was still early in the evening, for we shut up a couple of hours sooner on a Saturday. I made up my mind what to do. I would solve every doubt and make sure of the matter. I would leave the stranger in charge of my workman, take my good strong horse and ride over to Andrew Gibson. A five miles' ride would soon be accomplished, and I should sleep all the sounder after I had consulted Ruth, and heard what she would advise.

This hasty journey would not have been needed but for the state of my dear old master's health. For the last few weeks he had been sinking fast, and we could hardly reckon on one day after another. How I longed that, before he went to his rest, he might be permitted to embrace his son!





CHAPTER XX.

A SUNDAY NEVER TO BE FORGOTTEN.



WHEN I opened the door of my parlour, the same pleasant home-scene again presented itself. I had however been missed, for there was the look of welcome in every face—just the look that is so dear, and that a man likes to meet with by his own fireside.

“Well, Harry!” said my wife, in a tone of interest, and laying down her work.

“Well, Susan!” was my reply. “But no; I must not sit down,”—for she had drawn my chair to the fire,—“I must be off directly.”

“What! to-night, in the snow? Is it necessary?” she asked, anxiously.

When I told her how it was, she made no opposition. All through our married life we had been as husband and wife should be—of one heart and of one

mind. Susan felt an attachment to Andrew Gibson, and took a deep interest in the fate of his son. She would not have withheld me from going on any account. And in a very short time I was cantering along at a quick pace towards Andrew Gibson's house.

He had been keeping his bed for the last few days, and there would be no difficulty in seeing Ruth alone. Indeed, to see Ruth alone, was the gist and purport of my visit.

It was striking nine by the village clock as I rode up the street and opened the gate leading to the house. There were lights in the windows ; and as I wished for the present my visit to be kept secret from Andrew Gibson, I slipped off my horse and proceeded on foot, letting myself quietly into the kitchen.

I startled Ruth, who was stooping over the fire preparing some kind of food for her uncle ; but I signed to her to be quiet. I had something, I said, that I wished to say privately ; and I beckoned her as noiselessly as I could into a little room at the back, where I thought we could not be heard. It was ever on their minds, this topic of the lost son's return ; and the first word she said, as she closed the door behind us, was,—

“Have you heard ? Do you know anything ? Is that why you are come ?”

“Ruth,” I said eagerly, “tell me whether you should know him again, now all these years have passed ?”

“Yes,” she replied ; “though he was a mere boy when he went away, I should recognise him, I am

convinced. I could pick him out among a thousand, let him come home as he might."

Then I told her what had happened. She listened with the utmost eagerness, and the tears started to her eyes.

"What are we to do?" I asked her. "What could you advise?"

"Oh, he must come!" she exclaimed. "You must bring him, Harry, *to-morrow*."

She laid an emphasis on the word *to-morrow*, the reason of which I knew too well. I knew that time was getting short, and death marching on apace. Her uncle was scarcely conscious then, she said, but he might rally once again.

"Come to-morrow, early," she repeated. "And God grant it may be as we think!"

An eventful Sunday that would be, I thought, as I rode home after my interview with Ruth; but perhaps the happiest in my life, if so be that the prodigal is welcomed to his father's home.

"My place at church must be vacant." Susan smiled as she heard me say so.

"Yours is a labour of love," she said; "and though absent from God's house, the Sabbath blessing will be upon you."

As soon as our early breakfast was over, I had my horse put in the gig and drove to the other end of the town. The stranger had, by my express orders, been carefully watched to the place where he lodged, and a guard kept on his movements. He was sitting by the fireless grate when I entered the room, his face buried in his hands. I had to touch him before

I could rouse his attention. As he looked up, I fancied I could trace a likeness to my dear old master. The expression, it is true, was different; in the one case it was all peace, in the other disquiet and remorse. One spoke of religion with its placid and satisfying joys, the other seemed to proclaim that the way of the transgressor is hard.

"Friend," I said, standing by him, "you wish to see Mr. Gibson; this is why you lingered about the place yesterday. Well, I will take you to him *now*."

He shrank back with evident reluctance.

"*Now*," I repeated firmly; "because every day is of importance; to-morrow may be too late."

I can scarce recall every particular of the conversation. I know it lasted but a little time; and then he was beside me in the gig, and we were bowling along.

Just as we quitted the town, I recollect that the Sabbath-bells rang out through the frosty air. Blessed sound! I seem to hear it now. It comes upon my ear like the music of another world.

The weather had cleared up, and the winter sun shone cheerily. We had a silent ride. My companion appeared dejected, and at times agitated. As for myself, I was more and more satisfied that God had heard the prayer so long offered in faith and earnestness, and was sending an answer of peace.

As we approached the house, I got out of the gig, and fastened the horse to a gate. Then I walked forwards, the stranger by my side. I could perceive that he was more and more affected, nay, that he trembled violently. A figure was in the doorway. I

knew who it was, and that Ruth was on the watch. As soon as she saw us she came to meet us. I shall never forget the suspense of that moment. But it was quickly passed. She gave one searching look at the stranger, and then she took his hand in hers and called him by his name. She had recognised him, as she said she should, in an instant.

I stepped on before. I thought they might wish to have a few words together : that Ruth might wish to prepare him for what was coming. As I entered the kitchen, a woman who had been assisting to nurse, and who had sat up with the patient, met me.

"Mr. Gibson is awake, sir," she said, "and wants to see you. He knows you are come, for he heard the sound of the gig."

I went softly up stairs, my heart full to overflowing. The same eager wistful look met me as I stood by the bedside.

"Harry, you must not deceive me. You were here last night, and you are here again this morning. Is it about my boy?"

I took the poor wrinkled hand in mine. I was obliged to proceed with the utmost caution on account of his feebleness, but by degrees I told him everything. One fact after another slipped out, and ere I had finished, I heard voices in the room below. He heard them too.

"Let him come, Harry. Let him come. I must see him before I die!"

And he was dying fast : I saw it in his face.

I did not return home till night. It was an eventful Sunday—one that can never be forgotten. It was

the last day that my dear old master had given him to live. For a few hours he rallied, and they were alone—the father and the son. No one cared to break in upon the sacred retirement of an interview such as that.

He was very happy when at last we were summoned to his bedside. Almost with his last breath he repeated the well-known words which were being sung in the village church close by: “Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy word.” And in the quiet of that Sabbath evening he entered into rest.

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